



A leading industrialised state of India, Maharashtra historically stands at the cross-roads of the North and the South of the Indian sub-continent described by scholars as 'a culture contact region par excellence'. Indeed, over the centuries, it has assimilated and absorbed cultural traits from both these directions and it continues to do so even today. In a brief but comprehensive overview of Maharashtra, this book gives deep insights into the history, politics and economy of the state, as also its culture with its nuances, the literature, characteristics of its people and their temperament. In a lucid narration, the author has successfully tried to place this Western state in a broader Indian perspective.

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National Book Trust, India



# Maharashtra



Arun Sadhu

*India — The Land and the People*

# *Maharashtra*



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## Preface

Writing this book has been a rewarding experience. The joy was in re-discovering Maharashtra while reading and browsing through numerous books and reports to gather information and facts. Though one were aware of the many facets and dimensions of Maharashtra's history, its geography, nature, land and its people, the research and exercise of writing the book unfolds for the writer the full glory of the land in its many splendoured details.

There are hundreds of books on different aspects of Maharashtra, many in Marathi and a few in English. But regrettably, few of these books deal with Maharashtra as a whole comprehensively. Maharashtra has produced commendable encyclopaedic literature in Marathi from the late 19th century. But, perhaps as a reflection of an average Maharashtrian's diffidence and lack of aggressive salesmanship, there is little attempt to boldly introduce Maharashtra to curious outsiders. It must be acknowledged, though, that the Government of Maharashtra's Information and Public Relations Department and the Maharashtra Information Centre in New Delhi have brought out some excellent publications on various interesting aspects of the State. The tourism department too has rendered itself appropriately.

Nevertheless, there is a lack of people's initiative and dearth of definitive books which should satiate the curiosity of a tourist, a student and a scholar alike. For authentic



information on many subjects, one has to turn to that amazingly rich treasure left behind by our erstwhile rulers—the District Gazetteers. Though it is a great pleasure browsing the gazetteers, not all curious information seekers have the grit and patience to search for and go through the bulky volumes. The present book does not claim to fill that void. However, it does attempt to give a broad idea of what Maharashtra is and to offer some insight of its social life, culture and its people. Attempt is also made to trace its curve of progress and development and offer an analysis of some of its noticeable shortcomings.

A book of this kind presents many challenges. Brevity enforces compulsions which leave certain inevitable shortcomings. All the facets of a state of the size of Maharashtra cannot be fully explored in the space available. It is not possible to accommodate a full catalogue of all the names that matter in the state's history and contemporary lore. Not even all those who made a visible impact on the life of the state and the country can be treated with justice. The book essentially is a compilation of information and facts borrowed from numerous sources. Even so, in a bid to provide objective analysis and insight, judgements and opinions are bound to creep in. Care is taken to ensure that such comments and analysis would enhance readability and quality of the book on the one hand and would not affect its utility on the other.

Not mentioning those who have helped in providing information, facts and sources will smack of ingratitude. But that will be a long list and an inadvertent omission will amount to an insult. It is best in these circumstances to express indebtedness to all those whose help has made writing of this book possible.

ARUN SADHU

## INTRODUCTION

The famous Marathi poet, Ram Ganesh Gadkari, while extolling the virtues of his homeland, describes it thus:

*Rough country, thorny country,*

*a country made of rugged stones*

*Tender and delicate, the country of fragrant flowers*

*Sacred country, the country of the brave and the pure*

The contradictions aptly reflect the contrasting sheds in the geographic makeup of Maharashtra as also those in the peculiar character of the Maharashtrian people. Rough and thorny they may seem outwardly, but at heart they are a sensitive people always willing to accommodate and share except when their pride is hurt. They may not care much for romantic sentimentalism, they may be lacking in social graces, mores and behavioural elan, their sartorial appearance and household décor may be simple and functional yet they are the people with a practical bent of mind. And when it comes to tender feelings and romantic idealism, they are as dreamy as any other Indian. They do have the flair for good classical music, fascination of the theatre and appreciation for aesthetic subtlety of the creative artiste. They are generally no non-sense matter-of-fact people with a practical realism with deep commitment to a rational and intellectual discourse.

### Proud People

Above all, they are a proud people, proud of their history and their contribution to the great Indian enterprise. Maharashtra literally means a super nation and the poet indeed refers to Maharashtra as a *Desh*, a 'country' (the song was composed in the first decade of the last century). But the poet, like an average Maharashtrian, considers himself an Indian first. If ever a Maharashtrian gushes out with sentimentalism, it is when his patriotism is involved. Maharashtra, he proudly claims, is the sword arm of India. He regards Maharashtra as a state not simply made of geographical boundaries, but a region with remarkable history. The Marathi speaking people, who constitute the linguistic state of Maharashtra, had never lived together in a unified political unit in the known history. For centuries, its different regions—Vidarbha, Marathwada, Khandesh, Western Maharashtra and Konkan—lived under different political dispensations, often warring and only rarely at peace with each other, a fate which most of the Indian sub-continent has gone through for over two millennia.

But amazingly, all through the political vicissitudes, the people preserved their language and the "Maratha" culture. From Gondia—Sakoli in the East to Kanakavali—Sawantwadi in the West and from Dhulia in the North to Sholapur—Kolhapur in the South, people spoke the same language with little variations, they sung the same songs, had common rituals and festivals and preserved the same rich sartorial and culinary cultures. It was only in 1956 in the larger bilingual Bombay state that these regions came together in one political unit for the first time in history. The formation of the linguistic Maharashtra state was, therefore, celebrated in 1960 with great fanfare.

### Culture Contact region

Today one of the most developed industrialised states of

India, Maharashtra historically, stands at the cross-roads of the North and the South of the Indian sub-continent. As the late Ms. Iravati Karve, scholar and indologist, liked to describe it, it is 'a culture contact region par excellence'. Over the centuries, Maharashtra has assimilated and absorbed cultural traits from both these directions and indeed even from the East. People of North Western districts of Thane, Nasik and Dhule have a close association and relationship with Gujarat; those of the rest of Khandesh and Berar with the Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh; the eastern districts of Vidarbha are nearly a part of Mahakoshal and most southern districts right from Chandrapur and Nanded to Sholapur and Kolhapur are closely linked with Telugu and Kannada cultures. Maharashtra is neither a part of the northern Hindi heartland nor the distinctly Dravidian South India. It has been a meeting ground for the two cultures, a veritable melting pot of the quintessentially plural Indian milieu.

Unfortunately, there has been a general perception in India that Maharashtra is an intolerant state. This perception is shaped partly by Maharashtrians' robust spirit of manly independence, their historically uncompromising attitude towards concept of freedom, and partly by the vagaries of modern Indian politics. But contrary to this image, an objective view of history and contemporary social ambience of the state shows that Maharashtrians generally are tolerant people with a readiness to share their prosperity and good fortune with migrants from most parts of the country. For centuries, Maharashtra has welcomed with open arms people coming in search of livelihood from North, South and East, and the local Marathi people have hardly ever imposed their culture or language on them. For over a millennium, Bene-Israeli Jews, Zoroastrian Parsis, Rajasthani and Gujarati traders, Telugu and Kannada priests, North Indian workers have lived in Maharashtra in perfect

harmony. So did the Sikhs and Christians. The second most sacred place of the Sikhs is Nanded in Marathwada region where the ashes of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and the last guru in the illustrious guru lineage of the Sikhs, are buried. The magnificent gurudwara there draws devotees from all over India.

In Maharashtra, linguistic parochialism is confined to political domain meant only for slogans and rhetoric rather than a way of life. For generations, families from far away places speaking different tongues and bringing their specific regional cultures with them have lived in the urban centres and remote districts of Maharashtra without speaking Marathi. They lived well and prospered. Most urban centres in Maharashtra have a cosmopolitan culture. The composition of elected representative institutions, from legislative houses to district, municipal and local self-government bodies reflects this fact unmistakably. Maharashtrians as a society have a deep commitment to India as a plural society and to the values of democracy, liberty, equality and tolerance. The state cabinet always has a handful of non-Marathi speaking members. The bureaucracy of Maharashtra too reflects India's mosaic-like unity in diversity.

### Liberal and Assimilative

This remarkable tolerance and liberal trait of Maharashtra is attributed by scholars to three phenomena. The strong social reform movement during the early days of the British Raj which shaped the social demeanour of Maharashtra is one. The other and more important is policies and character of Shivaji, the Great hero of Maratha independence, who dared to dream of freedom from slavery in an era when the land of Maharashtra was almost barren of any infrastructure to confront the power of the mighty Moguls. The third factor is the *warkari sampradaya* which preached *bhakti*, honesty and humility and tolerance.

Shivaji hardly ever aspired for a tutelage under either the Moguls or the Nizam, contrary to the practice prevalent among the feudal chiefs of that era. He coined the word *swarajya* two-and-half centuries before Lokmanya Tilak and coroneted himself as a sovereign king. It is he who breathed the spirit of freedom among the rugged farmers living at the feet of Sahyadri Mountains. An extra-ordinary leader and a man of vision, Shivaji conceived a welfare state, a *kalyaankari Rajya* where caste, creed or religion will not come in the way of serving the *swarajya*. He dissolved the large holdings of the feudal landlords and introduced the more progressive *ryotwari* system of land holdings. He lived in an era when religion governed most of the social life of the people.

And yet, in a typical Hindu assimilative trait, Shivaji had great regard for Islam, was devotee of Sufi saints and had a fair sprinkling of Mussalmans among his bodyguards, his militias, generals and guardians of his forts. Legends abound about how he treated with great respect Muslim women and the holy book of Koran during and after any war. Sadly, some petty politicians reduce him to a regional leader for small transient gains while historians accord him a much greater status. Maharashtra was also fortunate to have, during the early decades of the 19th Century, a galaxy of social réformers, thinkers and activists—Mahatma Jotiba Phule, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, 'Lokahitawadi' Deshmukh, Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj, to name but a few. They did a pioneering work in attacking the social ills and prejudices and left a lasting impact on Maharashtra. During the struggle for independence, Maharashtra produced a long line of great national leaders whose contribution to shaping modern India cannot be ignored.

Of them Dadabhai Naoroji, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak are regarded the national

icons even today. Mahatma Gandhi once said that Maharashtra was a beehive of committed social workers. And truly, even after independence, Maharashtra never lacked bands of dedicated souls who laid their lives for one cause or the other, spawned one movement after another for upliftment of the downtrodden, for amelioration of the oppressed, for defence of project-affected have-nots, for the service of the leprosy affected—Baba Amte and Medha Patkar are the icons on the new genre acknowledged the world over.

At heart, a Maharashtrian is a politically active person. It is not a coincidence that most major national political parties four decades ago which made an impact on the national politics had their origin in Maharashtra. Bombay, now called Mumbai, the capital of Maharashtra, was in 1885 host to the first convention of the longest surviving political party in the world, the Indian National Congress. The Communist movement in India had its beginnings in the lowly chawls in the congested Girgaum area of Mumbai. The largest concentration of the Socialist dissenters within the Congress movement was, of course, in Maharashtra. At one time during the sixties' leaders of the most opposition parties were Maharashtrians—S.A. Dange, B.T. Ranadive, S.M. Joshi, N.G. Gore and so on. Not to be left behind, the trade union movement in India had its beginnings in Mumbai, much before the advent of Marxist ideology and the Communist Party of India. The first industrial strike in Mumbai was observed in the year 1890. The 'dalits' of India, now ascendant in socio-political and economic areas, owe their position today to a large extent to yeoman service rendered by Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, a giant of an intellectual who could very well rank with national leaders of the stature of Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Azad and Bose.

### Cultural Heritage

Maharashtra has a rich cultural heritage. It has retained many vestiges of its traditional folk culture. The *Bhakti* cult of the *Warkaris* spawned by the great saint poets such as Jnaneshwar, Namdeo, Eknath, Tukaram and Ramdas still holds sway over the minds and spiritual aspirations of the common people. The contemporary Marathi literature, be it modern or post-modern, still draws its strength from the fountains of medieval works left behind by the galaxy of these noble saints. The *Warkari* cult instituted by them has millions of followers in Maharashtra who make an annual pilgrimage on foot to Pandharpur, the seat of God Vithal, an incarnation of Vishnu. Many sociologists believe that the *Warkari* philosophy is no less responsible for the values of equality and tolerance so deeply ingrained in the Maharashtrian society.

One would be amiss in introducing the Maharashtrian society if a mention is not made of its passion for the theatre and music. Though many archaeologists and historians believe that ancient Sanskrit poet Kalidasa lived for a while at Ramtek near Nagpur and composed his famous classic *Meghdoot* there, theatre was almost non-existent in Maharashtra, just as in the whole of India, after the decline of Sanskrit drama. The coarse folk theatre did play a role in entertaining the rural masses. But the theatre in its modern sense had comparatively an early beginning in Maharashtra in 1840 followed by a burgeoning theatre movement. It has penetrated to mofussil and rural Maharashtra. The momentum continues.

Likewise, it was in Maharashtra that the Indian classical music witnessed its revival no less owing to the meticulous efforts of such Maharashtrian pioneers as Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande, and Balkrishnabuwa Ichalkaranjikar. For a long period, Maharashtrian vocalists held sway over hearts of discerning music lovers of India...



Bhimsen Joshi, Kishori Amonkar, Kumar Gandharva, Bal Gandharva, Lata Mangeshkar, Asha Bhosale... The roll call is long and illustrious. And cricket, the obsession of the Indian middle class? The story of the Indian cricket would not be complete without mentioning Sunil Gavaskar, Sachin Tendulkar, Ajit Wadekar, Sandeep Patil, Vengsarkar...

Today, Maharashtra is the leading industrialised state in India, thanks to the contribution of Mumbai's enterprising Gujaratis, Rajasthanis and of course the miniscule but robust community of the Parsis. After the decline of Calcutta in early fifties', Mumbai became the industrial and commercial capital of the country and it still retains that position. Maharashtra's contribution to the national treasury by way of Income Tax is no less than one half of the total collection. The textile industry, first set up in Mumbai in the late nineteenth Century, had spread far and wide in Maharashtra creating a politically aware working class.

One cannot escape dealing with a major shortcoming of the Maharashtrian in this introductory eulogisation. Be it a quirk of history, geography, economy or socio-spiritual make-up of the Maharashtrian mind; or sheer lethargy and lack of organisational acumen. Whatever the reason, but the fact that a Maharashtrian is completely innocent of a trading culture, of the spirit of material entrepreneurship has been a matter of hair-splitting debate for over a century among intellectuals, political leaders, economists and sociologists. Not that Marathi society did not have a trading caste the *vaishya-vani*. The *vanjaras*, a nomadic tribe, too has played a trading role from ancient times carrying salt, grains, textiles and such other utilities from place to place. The mule, the donkey, the horses were the beasts of burden carrying the goods. But curiously enough, the typical Maharashtrian, who would readily take to sword to defend the nation, work on the accounts for big houses, nurse his farm, enjoy his career as a salaried academic, bureaucrat or a clerk, shies

away from trade and commerce. Maharashtrian intellectuals are still trying to understand and fathom this despairing trait.

### **Farmer, the entrepreneur**

Winds of change are aboard, though. The new generations, trained in commerce, engineering, information technology, are plunging in daring enterprises with gusto. But this does not hide the fact that the commercial spirit has been missing in these people for a very very long time. When Shivaji established his capital at Fort Raigad, he invited traders and merchants from Gujarat and Rajasthan to set their shops. So did the Peshwas whenever they set up a new town or a *kasabah*. The traders came with their families and over generations have become one with the local people. They did not snap links with their homelands. But most of them adopted Maharashtra as their motherland, speaking the local language, adapting the Marathi culture in its fullness. Many Gujarati and Rajasthani business houses grown to the national stature proudly consider themselves an integral part of Maharashtra. Many of them have made their mark in the state's public life, culture and literature which speaks volumes about Maharashtra's assimilative ethos.

However, the lowly farmers of Maharashtra have shown by example that the spirit of enterprise is not entirely missing from this soil. By dint of hard work, diligence, imagination and innovations, the farmers have remarkably transformed large tracts of the state into verdant greenery, producing sumptuous food grains, fruits, vegetables and sugarcane. It is not the famous Alfonso mango of Ratnagiri alone for which Maharashtra is known. The high quality seedless grapes from Tasgaon and Baramati, the figs of Pune, the luscious pomegranates of Ahmednagar have found lucrative markets in lands far away. The farmers regularly browse the internet to locate profitable markets abroad for

their produce. Above all, the innovative spirit of the Marathi farmer has manifested most gloriously in the agro-based processing industries.

It was almost an illiterate farmer of Ahmednagar district, Vitthalrao Vikhe-Patil, who, along with noted economist D.R. Gadgil, conceived the idea of a farmers' cooperative sugar factory. Thus the first farmers' cooperative sugar mill in India was set up in 1956 at Loni. Vikhe-Patil was later honoured with Padmashree. Soon, the rural Maharashtra took to the idea with zeal and a large network of cooperative sugar factories, particularly in Western Maharashtra, transformed what was once a drought-prone zone into a growing prosperous economy. The rural purchasing power in Kolhapur and Sangli district is considered among the highest in India. The cooperative sugar movement not only stabilised the life of farmers, it enriched the rural ambience as a whole by establishing educational institutions, boosting the service sector and encouraging numerous ancillaries.

The Western coast of the state is washed by the Arabian sea. The 'rugged, thorny' and rock-like spurs of Sahyadri mountains almost dip their feet in the sea, sometimes jutting into the water creating deep gorges, at other places looking at the golden beaches from a distance. In the rainy season, the verdant hills, the gorges and the creeks of Konkan present a gorgeous sight to the eye. The mountains slope gently towards the east in a large plateau, the largest in the Indian peninsula creating a narrow belt of rain-shadow area cutting across the state from North to South. However, several eastward flowing rivers, notable among them Godavari, Krishna and Bhima, have chiselled fertile valleys spawning civilizations from ancient times. In the North are gentle Satpura ranges, not as overbearing as the Sahyadri.

The eastern districts of Vidarbha have rivers flowing South such as Wardha and Painganga and some flowing

West, Purna and Tapti. While the triangle of Mumbai--Pune and Nasik is a beehive of major industrial activity, South Maharashtra and Khandesh to an extent have excelled in horticulture. Marathwada to the South-East and Vidarbha were once called granaries of the state producing grains and cotton in abundance. The forests of Vidarbha have several tiger sanctuaries. Both Sahyadri and Satpura and their several spurs have beautiful hill stations presenting breathtaking panorama of natural wealth. Some of the plateaus are dotted by rugged solid forts, a testimony to the ruggedness of the people themselves. The historic mountain forts, some of them built by Shivaji, had lent unique defence parameters to Maharashtra terrain when battles were fought with swords and arrows.

Thus, Maharashtra, the home of a proud people whose contributions have gone a long way in shaping up modern India, presents an exciting story and a promising destination for ambitious entrepreneurs, for seekers of new adventures, for the academically and scholastically inclined and for tourists in search of beauty and history. The present book is an attempt to present in brief the multi-dimensional entity that is Maharashtra.

## PHYSICAL FEATURES, FLORA AND FAUNA

### The Land and the Climate

The state of Maharashtra came into existence in 1960 by a law of Parliament. It brought together in one political and administrative unit most of the Marathi-speaking areas which till then had separate political existence in different provinces—the heartland of Western Maharashtra, Konkan and Northern areas of Khandesh were in the Bombay Presidency which also included large areas of Gujarati, Kannada, Telugu and Tamil speaking people; the Marathwada area in Nizam's Hyderabad State; and Vidarbha in the Central Province. In the first phase of linguistic reorganisation of states in India, the single political unit of all the Marathi speaking areas was rejected for reasons which triggered much controversy.

As a compromise, the present area of Maharashtra was joined with Gujarat to form a sprawling bilingual Bombay State in 1956. The city of Bombay, which had nearly half its population of Marathi origin, was the bone of contention. After much controversy and people's agitations in both linguistic areas, the illogic of the bilingual state was acknowledged and it was divided between Gujarat with Gandhinagar as its capital and Maharashtra with Bombay, later renamed Mumbai, as the capital on May 1, 1960. Mr. Y.B. Chavan, chief minister of the bilingual province, remained the chief of Maharashtra too.

The state with a total land area of 3,06,345 sq. kms. occupies a major portion of the Indian peninsula and comprises nearly one-tenth of the area of the Indian republic. It lies between latitudes 22.1 and 16.4 degrees North and longitudes 72.6 and 80.9 degrees East. Maharashtra is endowed with about 700 km. long sea coast. The actual sea coast extends from Goa border at Terekhel creek in the South to about 130 kms. North of Mumbai, that is between 15.6 and 20.2 degrees North latitude, a seaboard on the Arabian sea of about 4.6 degrees.

The total population of the state by 2003 was expected to cross the 10 crore mark. Roughly, this is about one eleventh of India's population. In terms of area, it is the second largest and population-wise (after the division of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh) also the second largest state in India and hence occupies an important position in the Indian socio-political and economic life. The Arabian Sea defines Maharashtra's western boundary while the state of Gujarat lies at its North-West. Madhya Pradesh is on the North and now Chhattisgarh touches its North-East. Karnataka is in the South and Andhra Pradesh South-East. The erstwhile Portuguese territory of Goa, which also has a large Marathi-speaking population, lies at its South-West.

### Deccan Plateau

For students of geology, Maharashtra presents interesting physical features. The state physically is divided in two parts—the narrow coastal strip of Konkan West of Sahyadri ranges and the famous Deccan plateau East of the mountain. The sprawling Deccan Plateau or trap as it is called, is cut by several river systems. Major among them are i) Godavari valley running from North to South-East in Marathwada; ii) Krishna valley in the South; iii) Wardha-Wainganga valley of East Vidarbha and iv) Tapi-Purna valley of West Vidarbha which is called Warhad corrupted as Berar in English.

The Deccan Plateau is a solid land mass of homogeneous basaltic structure made of layers upon layers of lava erupted from fissures from time to time between 7 and 8 million years ago. This has gifted Maharashtra with a vast expanse of black cotton soil and mountain ranges rising gradually like terraces. There are two principal mountain ranges, Sahyadri or the Western Ghats and the Satpura. The Sahyadri ranges are never far too away from the sea coast. The roads leading from Mumbai to Pune and to Nasik—go through the mountain passes at the heights of about 600 to 700 meters and afford breathtaking views to the travellers. Sahyadri peaks rise up to nearly 1600 meters, the highest peak of Kalasubai near Nasik being as high as 1640 meters.

At right angles to the Sahyadri running West to East are four ranges of hills including the major one, Satpura. The Satpura range lies between the Tapi and Narmada basins, running from Nasik and traversing all the way to the Eastern districts of Vidarbha. It forms Northern boundaries of Dhule, Jalgaon, Buldhana and Amravati districts of the State. The other three secondary ranges are the Ajanta Hills, which lies to the South of the Tapi basin and North of Godavari, the Balaghat range which lies to the South of the upper Godavari basin and North of the Bhima river basin. The last is the Mahadeo hills range which separates the Bhima basin from the upper Krishna river basin. The interesting fact is all the districts of Maharashtra, except the Sholapur district in the South, have hills large and small. Towards the Western coast, the mountains drop precipitously providing a panoramic view of what the poet calls the 'thorny, rock-like rugged' Maharashtra.

#### **Sahyadri Lore**

Sahyadri has an important place in Maharashtra's consciousness and is a subject of thriving folklore. This is

on account of its majestic beauty as also because of its important role in Maharashtra's history. Shivaji organised the ordinary peasants living in the Mawal area of Sahyadri slopes to fight for freedom. It was here in these rugged mountains, the jungles, valleys and difficult passes that Shivaji developed his skills of guerrilla warfare to face the might of the superior armies of the Moguls and other established sultanates. Ancient forts associated with hoary history and Shivaji and some of them of the 17th century built by Shivaji himself dot the hilltop plateaus at many places.

Although separated by many ranges, river valleys, differences in geographic and climatic conditions, the whole of Maharashtra presents more or less a distinctive Marathi culture with the same language (albeit with differences in local dialects), same folklores, same folksongs, same deities to worship with similar devotional songs and the same culinary and sartorial culture prevailing all over from Sakoli in the extreme east to Sawantwadi, roughly over 1400 km by road to the south-west in coastal Sindhudurg district. However, each river valley has spawned a sub-culture of its own enriching the whole while drawing from the other sub-cultures and sharing traits with one another.

Godavari is the largest and the most sacred river of the state. It rises in the North near Nasik and flows South-East through central Maharashtra and Marathwada districts into Andhra Pradesh before pouring into the Bay of Bengal near Rajahmundry. Further southward, the Wardha-Wainganga bringing the soil of Vidarbha with them also pour into Godavari. Not for nothing Godavari is called the mother river or the main artery of Maharashtra. The town of Nasik on its banks is described by many as the southern Kashi (Varanasi) and the *Kumbha Mela* of Nasik held every 12 years is only second in importance to the one held at Prayag. Devotees and sadhus from all over India congregate at Nasik



and adjoining holy place of Tryambakeshwar when the *mela* occurs.

### Godavari—The Mother River

As it traversed through Maharashtra, Godavari brought to life several ancient urban cultures of Maharashtra. The city of Paithan in Aurngabad district, called Pratishthan in ancient times, was a flourishing centre of trade, business and administration and is referred to in Buddhist *jatakas* way back in the 2nd century B.C. The subsequent Satavahana rulers, who are said to have given Maharashtra a distinct identity during their regime, had their capital in Pratishthan. Many saint-poets, particularly Jnaneshwar did their penances on the banks of Godavari. Suffice it to say that Godavari has enriched both material and spiritual life of Maharashtra through the millennia like river Ganga has that of north India.

While river Krishna runs through Maharashtra for a short distance, it has also provided sumptuous irrigation triggering a virtual green revolution in Kolhapur, Sangli, Satara and Pune districts of South Maharashtra. Nonetheless, it is a secondary system for Maharashtra serving a limited area. On the other hand, the Wardha-Wainganga system which covers the entire east Vidarbha has an interesting geological feature. It is located where the Deccan trap begins to recede and the archaic rocks of central India take over. This geological transition has gifted the region with a wealth of minerals. Most of Maharashtra's minerals particularly coal, manganese, limestone and iron ore, are found in this region. The region receives comparatively far better amount of rainfall than the rest of Maharashtra (other than Konkan). Paddy is the main crop here.

The Tapi-Purna valley which defines the transition between the Deccan Plateau and the Central India covers most parts of Western Vidarbha and parts of Khandesh. The

soil is fertile black cotton, the rainfall, particularly in the Vidarbha part of the valley, is more or less assured. This has produced an easy-going life style for which the Berar region is known. Many places along Tapi and Purna rivers lie on the ancient trade routes carrying traders from North to South and the other way round.

There is no uniform rainfall pattern in Maharashtra. As the Maharashtra gazetteers describes, the pattern can best be represented by means of bands or stripes of land North to South of varying East- West width. The coastal area of the Konkan forms a natural strip of land where the average rainfall is between 200 and 250 cm. a year. The next belt to the East is formed by the Sahyadri mountain ranges where the rainfall is between 375 and 500 cm. Some of the higher plateaus, such as Mahabaleshwar at 1,350 metres, has a rainfall of 600 cm. The next strip is at the Eastern foothills of the Sahyadri where the average suddenly drops to 100 cm. In the fourth strip further East which include the hilly districts of Western Maharashtra such as Pune, the average again decreases to 60 to 80 cm. To the East of Pune lies the notorious rain-shadow area, a belt cutting across Maharashtra from North to South where the rainfall drops to below 50 cm. This is the chronic drought prone belt which afflicts parts of Dhule, Nasik, Ahmednagar, Pune, Satara, Sangli, Sholapur, Bid, Usmanabad and Latur districts. Farther East, there are three belts, each with a higher average. Thus the Eastern-most area of Vidarbha comprising Nagpur, Bhandara, Gondia and Chandrapur districts have a comfortable average of 80 to 100 cm.

### Flora

The total area under forest in Maharashtra is roughly 55,544 sq.kms., constituting 18.4 per cent of the state's total land area. Besides, 11,192 hundred hectares are fallow land and 13,799 hectares grazing lands. The area under agriculture is

68.8 per cent. There is a sumptuous wealth of trees and plants, and wild life as also birds in Maharashtra. The variety is interesting, the natural scenery and landscape attractive. The floristic wealth is rich and diverse, both in composition and value. The forests contain varied plant species and include diverse vegetational types. Of flowering plants alone there are about 3,500 species covering about 1,200 genera and 150 families.

Some of the forest trees and plants have glorious floral blooms, eye catching and resplendent in their lavish splendour. Particularly breathtaking is a blooming *palas* (*Butea monosperma*) tree when it is leafless as is most of the forest in early spring (March). Through the leafless branches burst out clusters of flaming vermilion coloured flowers reaching out to the sky. The tree is aptly called *The Flame of the Forest*. And when a whole forest of *palas* is in bloom, the scene is as riveting and awe inspiring as a forest fire.

Also in the spring, the *semal* (*Salmalia malabarica*) tree sprouts large flaming red flowers which are clustered on bare boughs in the lofty canopy of deepest crimson, a pleasing contrast against the deep blue sky. It is called *The Silk Cotton Tree*. The flowers are sweet and birds flock to feast on them. Similarly, the *pangara* (*Erithrina indica*), the Indian coral tree with its brilliant scarlet blooms, the *amaltas* (*Cassia fistula*) or the *Indian Laburnum* displaying translucent yellow pendants, the *khumb* (*Careya arborea*) which sprouts opulent pink and white flowers, fresh and delicate, adorn Maharashtra's wilderness.

The forests are mainly concentrated in following regions of the state:

1. Chandrapur-Bhandara region at the extreme east of the state.
2. Tapi valley in Khandesh i.e. Satpura ranges in North Maharashtra.
3. The Western and Eastern flanks of Sahyadris.

4. In the spurs of Satpura in Melghat region of Amravati district in Vidarbha.

Besides these, there are few other forests with mangroves, beach forests, forests on riverine terraces etc.

The best forests are in the Chandrapur-Bhandara region, some valleys of Sahyadri; in Melghat and in the low hills of Ajanta-Satmala ranges.

Although no uniform system of forest classification is applicable to Maharashtra authorities classify forests as follows:

**1. Evergreen Forests—Western Sub-Tropical Hill Forests—** Confined to the Western valleys of Sahyadri around Mahabaleshwar, Matheran, Amboli and Bhimashankar. Here evergreen trees more than 45 m. high with numerous epiphytes but few climbers form the multilayered forest canopy. The prominent species are *jamun* (*Syzygium cumini*), *pisa* (*Actinodaphne hookeri*), *anjani* (*Memecylon umbellatum*), *hirda* (*Terminalia chebula*) and *lanki* (*Olea dioica*).

**2. Semi-evergreen Forests—West Coast Semi-evergreen Forests:** Found on the Sahyadri between evergreen and moist deciduous forests in heavy rainfall areas of Ajra and Chandgarh in Kolhapur district, Koyana forests of Satara and in small local patches of Raigad district. Important trees are *kindal* (*Terminalia paniculata*), *hirda* (*Terminalia chebula*), *beheda* (*Terminalia belerica*) and *jamba* (*Xylia xylocarpa*) etc.

**3. The Moist Deciduous Forests—** Found in areas, top storey of vegetation is deciduous. Trees are 40 m high or more, heavily buttressed. The second storey is of mixed evergreen species. Undergrowth of canes and bamboos is shrubby and climbers dense. This type is mainly seen in Allapalli forests of Chandrapur as also in Raigad, Ratnagiri, Thane, Nasik and Bhandara where rainfall is heavy. Some of these are

teak-bearing forests and others are mixed. In Allapalli, teak (*Tectona gradis*) predominates along with *behada*, *dhavda* (*Anogeissus latifolia*), *shisam* (*Dalbergia latifolia*), *ain* (*Terminalia tometoasa*), *mahowa* (*Madhuca latifolia*), *moyin* (*Lannea coromandelica*), *kakad* (*Garuga pinnata*). The bamboos are of *manvel* (*Dendrocalamus strictus*) variety.

**4. Southern Tropical Dry Deciduous Forests**—Occupying the largest forest area in Maharashtra, these have trees roughly 20 m high. They dry up in summer. Species which predominate are not gregarious or heterogeneous. Small trees form canopy. Sunlight reaches the floor where grass grows. Climbers are few but a few epiphytic ferns, orchids and bamboos occur. Some are predominantly dry Teak-bearing forests and others are mixed. The tall teak forests occur in good measure in Nagpur, Chandrapur, Bhandara area adjoining the Bastar, Melghat in Amravati and in Yawatmal which provide excellent habitat for wild life. Other trees found *ain*, *salai* (*Boswellia serrata*), *dhavda*, *tendu* (*Diospyros melanoxylon*), *bija* (*Pterocarpus marsupium*), *lendia* (*Lagerstroemia parviflora*), *kullu* (*Sterculia urens*), *moyin* (*Lannea coromandelica*) and *mhowa*.

**5. Southern Tropical Thorn Forests**—These occur on dry and shallow soil in the plains with alkaline content. It is a low open forest characterised by Acacia species reaching 6 to 9 m high. It is generally found around Pune, Ahmednagar, Satara, Dhule and Sholapur.

**6. Littoral and Tidal Swamp Forests**—An evergreen closed forest of mangrove species occurring on sea creeks and coasts is seen along Maharashtra coast. High tides generally swamp this forest.

Useful as vegetable cover, only some of these forests are economically important. The Dry deciduous teak forests and the open grass lands are the most important among

these. Teak timber, gums and resins, mohuwa flowers, Cutch or Kath used for calico printing or in the betel leaf for chewing, tendu leave for bidi making are some of the important forest products which yield a modest revenue for the state.

### **Tigers, Panthers, Bisons**

Wild animals commonly found in Maharashtra are tiger, panther, bison, sambhar, chital, nilgai, barking deer, sloth bear and wild boar. The forests of Chandrapur, Amravati, Nagpur and bhandara are well known for tiger population, now an endangered specie. Bison used to be abundantly found in Radhanagari forests of Kolhapur, forests of Chandrapur, Nagzira in Nagpur and Pench valley in Bhandara. Melghat jungles also have bisons. Blackbucks are rather scarce and are now confined to a few pockets in Yeotmal, Bhir Parbhani and Nagpur forests. Wild buffaloes are seen in Bhamaragadh forests adjoining the Bastar jungles.

There is a large variety of birds in Maharashtra, apart from the crows and sparrows which are so plentiful around human habitations. Most notable are bulbul, shama, cuckoo, parakeet and peacock. The singing cuckoos and koyals are heard even in metropolitan Mumbai. There, amid the jungles of skyscrapers, in the house gardens or on the terraces, a surprise visitor may take your breath away for a moment—the peacock with its splendorous plumage spread out in full glory.

### **The Great Indian Bustard**

Other birds commonly found in the countryside are drongos, babblers, paradise flycatchers, sunbirds, kingfishers, orioles, hoopoes. Also common are jungle fowls, partridges, quails, storks, cotton teals and pigeons. The Great Indian Bustard which had its breeding grounds in the scrub forests of

Ahmednagar district, is now unfortunately almost extinct. Its rare appearance makes news for the media.

Migratory birds like geese, ducks, larks, wagtails and swallows are seen in large numbers during their seasons. In winter, more exotic migratory birds such as Siberian Cranes visit the creeks around Mumbai and water reservoirs all over the state. For the lovers of winged beauties, there are several bird sanctuaries in Maharashtra where bird watchers can feast their eye to their heart's content.

The forests in the state where the wild animals and birds occur in fair abundance are: Nagzira and Nawegaon in Bhandara, Pench Valley and Nagalwadi in Nagpur; Bora Garpit and Brahmanwada in Wardha; Tadoba, Kolsa, Moharli, Kanhargaon, Chaprala, Allapalli, Sironcha and Bhamragadh in Chandrapur; Melghat in Amravati; Kinwat in Nanded and Yawatwal; Yawal and Chopda in Jalgaon; Peth, Barhe and Harsul in Nasik; Tansa, Parali, Suryamal, Dhasai and Washala in Thane, Borivali in Greater Mumbai, Matheran, Karnala and Roha in Raigad, Bheemashankar, Khandala and Lonavala in Pune; Radhanagari in Kolhapur, Amboli and Rampur in Ratnagiri.

Rare animal and bird species declared as protected species in the state are: Wild buffalo, sambar, barsinga, chital, blackbuck, chinkara barking deer, crocodile and Indian rock python and among birds the Great Indian Bustard are the species declared as protected in the state.

There are four national parks and several wild life sanctuaries in Maharashtra. The national parks are:

1. Tadoba in Chandrapur district
2. Pench (Nagpur)
3. Nawegaon (Bhandara)
4. Borivali (Mumbai Suburban)
5. Kolkhas (Amravati).

The prominent wild life sanctuaries are:

1. Radhanagari—Bison (Kolhapur)
2. Karnala—Bird (Raigad)
3. Yawal (Jalgaon)
4. Tansa (Thane)
5. Nagzira (Bhandara)
6. Bor (Wardha)
7. Kinwat (Yavatmal & Nanded)



## INTERMINGLING OF RACES AND CULTURES

Like regional sub-cultural variations, a close scrutiny of the original inhabitants of the state reveals veritable intermingling of different anthropological elements. But as Iravati Karve observes, Maharashtra is made up roughly of Australoid-Europoid people. The skin colour of the people ranges from very dark to light brown. The eye colour is predominantly very dark brown (black) to brown with a few castes having not more than 10 per cent people with light greenish brown eyes. The hair colour is very dark but in some rare cases one may find brown or red hair. The stature ranges from short to medium though in some cases one finds tall to very tall people.

Karve notes that in each cultural feature, Maharashtra presents a picture of a thorough mingling of the Sanskrit and Dravidian. Most of the older folk strains and cultures of India are represented in Maharashtra. From urban and rural so-called upper castes to rural agriculturists and primitive tribes living in forests and hills till recently, one finds an admixture of human features typical of north-western India (as a southern continuation of the central Asiatic pastoral people of the steppes) and Dravidian India (a north-western projection of south east-Asian and Pacific Island people).

These findings substantiate the theory that pre-historic people came to settle here from all directions. What is not commonly found is the proto-Mongoloids strain of the east,

a people who occupied land from south China to central Burma. Among the primitive tribes, there is one tribe called *Korku* in the Melghat taluka of Amravati district which has features completely different from local *Gonds*, *Bhills* and *Madiyas*. The *Korku* people speak a variation of *Mundari* language which is spoken by the *Mundaris* of Orissa. How and when the *Korkus* came all the way from Orissa to settle in the far away Satpura hills of Amravati is a mystery yet to be solved. But they are known for their life style different from other tribes surrounding them, their striking physical features (especially the eyes, light green and brown with intricate geometrical patterns in the irises), their colourful attire and vigorous tribal dances. The other primitive tribes found in Maharashtra include *Warlis* of Thane, *Mahadeo Kolis* of Konkan, *Bhils* of Satpura and *Bhils*, *Gonds* and *Madiyas* of Amravati, Dhule, Chandrapur and Gadchiroli.

### Maharatta

Sociologically, Maharashtra broadly conforms to the pattern of general class structure under Chaturvarnya system found in India. The major caste is the Marathas to which belonged the ancient petty chiefs and the great Shivaji himself. Marathas comprise a little less than 40 per cent of the population and an overwhelming majority of them are rural farmers. However, all of them, poor landless farmers, wealthy landlords and the aristocratic families claim Kshatriya lineage... Marathas have been and continue to be a ruling caste fully conversant with the art of wielding power. Their substantial number allows them to dominate the modern political set up.

The other important caste is *Mahar*, the most numerous among the former untouchables of Maharashtra. There is no village in Maharashtra where there is no Mahar. They are found all the way from the coastal Konkan region to Raipur (Chhattisgarh) and forest villages of Bastar beyond

Eastern Maharashtra. Wherever they are found, they speak Marathi. In fact, some historians opine that the term Maharashtra is derived from Mahars—place where *Mahars* live i.e. *Maharatta*. According to the *Mahar* folk legend, *Mahars* lived in great numbers in the area and they were the rulers. In the typical social mechanism of caste structure evolved in Maharashtra termed 12 *Balutedar* in Marathi—*Mahars*, though untouchables, had important functions to perform for the village.

*Mahar* is a martial race which fought with valour for Shivaji. And during the early days of the British East India company, they were recruited in large numbers in the company's army. Indeed during the last skirmishes between the English and the Marathas in the Deccan before the fall of the Peshwas, *Mahar* soldiers fought on the British side and laid their lives in large numbers to defeat the Peshwa army. That was one way to avenge humiliation heaped on them during the Brahmin Raj of the Peshwa era. The British stopped recruiting *Mahars* after 1857 to placate the upper castes whose help they needed to consolidate their rule. Dr. Ambedkar, scholar and constitutionalist, is the greatest leader this versatile community produced. With encouragement from Ambedkar, the *Mahars* have come to prominence in literary and cultural life of Maharashtra.

### Demographic Logic

Other prominent castes include Brahmins who constitute less than 3.5 per cent of the population. Although at the pinnacle of social and cultural hierarchy, they had rarely held economic power of any consideration, except in the regime of Brahmin Peshwas of Pune. During the freedom movement, Brahmins actively participated in politics and even held political power after independence for some time. However, soon demographic logic drove them to the margins of political life. Nevertheless, they still hold sway

in intellectual professions and cultural arena. Among other castes, *Malis*, excellent diligent farmers and floriculturists, a caste to which Jotiba Phule belonged, *Dhangars*, shepherds and cultivators, and *Prabhus* (*kayasthas* with several sub-castes) have made some mark on Maharashtra's social life partly owing to their demographic dispersal or their peculiar characteristics.

This is no place to list the castes in any details and explain their characteristics and contribution. Moreover, times are changing and as mentioned in the introductory observations, a powerful social reform movement in Maharashtra during the last one-and-half century has radically changed the people's mindset. Few people bother about caste differences in day-to-day life. It is only the peculiar electoral dynamics that brings the caste factor to the fore in politics. In recent years, the Mandal Commission has revived the caste consciousness to some extent, particularly in political affairs and in the competitive job market. On this issue, Maharashtra is no exception to the prevailing mood in the country. But that should not restrain us from learning the hierarchy and the role of castes in each social unit, an unfortunate legacy of the past which a serious student can ignore at the peril of having a deficient comprehension of sociological dimensions of the society as it exists today.

While on this issue, it will be instructive to acquaint the reader with a classical village organisation system based on castes, professions and services peculiar only to Maharashtra. The system called 12-*Balutedar* had been in vogue for centuries and was practiced in most Marathi speaking areas irrespective of the political dispensation of the time. This goes to show the remarkable socio-cultural homogeneity of the Marathi society despite its dispersal in different and sometimes adversarial political regimes. '*Baluta*' means honorarium given in cereal or money to

people of certain castes against services rendered to the village people.

Those who receive the honorarium, given by each individual resident as and when he requires those services, are called *balutedars*. Sometimes the payment is given in terms of grains or a small piece of land. The artisan castes who receive *baluta* are carpenter, goldsmith, ironsmith, potter, cobbler etc. and service *balutedars* are barber, washerman, local priest, *Mang* who make ropes and *Mahar* who were assigned several duties by the village. At some places, the village *Patil* or the headman was also considered a *balutedar*.

### **Balutedar**

Usually, the headman or the chief was the biggest landholder of the village. Many other *balutedars*, particularly the artisans held land to considerable extent. Those holding land against *Baluta* were called *vatandars* and to be a *vatandar* was a matter of honour. Of these *balutedars*, *Mang* and *Mahar* were 'untouchables' and yet a *Mahar* would be proud of his '*vatan*.' The *balutedars* had to render specified services to all the villagers. For example, a carpenter had to attend to repairing a cultivator's bullock cart or an ironsmith sharpening his axe. A *mahar* had to carry message from place to place and do sundry errands. If the cultivator failed to pay the required honorarium, the *balutedar* could refuse to serve him next season. On certain festive occasions, the *balutedars* were given a place of honour and they had to perform an important duty for the village.

Not all villages had full-fledged system going with all the 12 *balutedars* in place. If a village could not sustain a goldsmith or a carpenter it would invite artisans from neighbouring village when needed. The system indicates a certain autonomy and self-sufficiency of the villages which was possible when village economy was simple and

uncomplicated. For ages, the Indian village has remained unchanged while wars waged around, pestilence ravaged the neighbourhood, regimes changed. The *baluta* organisation helped a village to remain secure and peaceful within its shell. With the advent of modern technology, roads, means of communication and modern shops close by, the *baluta* system is all but dead. A village can no longer remain a self-sufficient unit. Needs and wants of villagers have increased manifold as have their aspirations.

There is a steady flow of young men from villages to urban centres for jobs. Maharashtra's percentage of urban population is galloping. The ancient static system hardly held possibilities of infusing new elements in village life. It had become redundant and incompatible with modern life though it did serve useful purpose during a certain historic period. Dr. Ambedkar compared a village to a stagnant pool where all culture decayed and where fresh water could not flow. The fixed matrix of the system made every human intercourse secure, predictable. Everybody was certain of his or her position in the society. And when certainty becomes a permanent feature, all hope is doomed. In this remarkable work, '*Age of Uncertainty*', John Kenneth Galbraith, celebrated thinker, economist and former U.S. ambassador to India, has lucidly shown how the end of the age of certainty ushered in a new dawn for the world's oppressed and the downtrodden. With the demise of a static village system, one might say that the new age of uncertainty will open new vistas or progress for India. It must be mentioned here that no one shed tears over the demise of '*balutedar*' system in Maharashtra's villages.

### **Regions and Sub-cultures**

Within its distinctive homogenous Marathi culture, each river valley and each region or sub-region of Maharashtra has a sub-culture of its own, different from other sub-cultures

and yet similar in many other ways. Each region has a different geography, different weather patterns. They have somewhat different land-holding systems and different crop patterns. There is a noticeable difference in the dialects, sub-dialects and linguistic nuances of the Marathi language as it is spoken in each region. The political and economic developments of these regions have also been dissimilar. In modern times, people's awareness of development of their regions has to an extent fuelled a sense of injustice, anger about discrimination and caused frustration leading to acrimony amongst politicians of different regions. Some of the differences may have been accentuated owing to the fact that broadly the people of these regions have lived for centuries under different political cultures and also because of their proximity with the populace living across the boundaries speaking a different language with a different culture. Following regional divisions define the broad sub-cultures of Maharashtra:

1. Greater Mumbai and Konkan
2. Western Maharashtra
3. Marathwada
4. Vidarbha

Generally, Western Maharashtra and Konkan are regarded as the 'original components' of Maharashtra. This perception is misleading and creates much misunderstanding among the people of Vidarbha and Marathwada. Medieval Marathi tongue began flourishing first in the eastern Vidarbha region. The home of the Marathi culture is acknowledged as the Godavari valley which means mostly the Marathwada region. However, it is also true that the political, economic and social culture in the sub-region called Western Maharashtra is far more homogenous than in other parts.

In terms of economic development, political modernisation and spread of modern education, Western

Maharashtra and Mumbai were much advanced compared to other regions. Traditions of social reforms here were strong. The people, having availed of the modern education first under the British, were first to enter the bureaucracy and other government jobs thus participating to some extent in government's decision making processes. The people of Marathwada did not have these benefits. Vidarbha too had fallen behind as it was a little late addition to the British-administered territories. Undoubtedly, these differences have not affected the sociological homogeneity of the state. The sociological composition of castes, with demographic and economic domination of the Marathas, is strikingly similar in all the regions.

The administrative commissionerates of modern Maharashtra generally conform to the sub-cultural divisions described above. These are: 1. Mumbai (Mumbai and Konkan) 2. Pune (Western Maharashtra) 3. Nasik (Khandesh or North Maharashtra) 4. Aurangabad (Marathwada) 5. Amravati (five districts of Eastern Vidarbha. These districts have a different history and a separate identity. The sub-region is known as Warhad corrupted as Berar in English.) 6. Nagpur (Vidarbha).

### **Konkan**

Konkan, comprising four districts of Thane, Raigad, Ratanagiri and Sindhudurg, is a narrow strip of undulating land sandwiched between the Arabian Sea and the overbearing cliffs of Sahyadri. Fed by the sumptuous rainfall of a bout 200 cms a year, the short and westward flowing rivers of Konkan promptly discharge the seasonal floods into the sea and remain barren rest of the year. Deep valleys, soaring mountains, meandering creeks and verdant gorges lend Konkan a spectacular beauty, rich flora and fauna, but not so easy a life for the humans. The mountainous terrain makes physical communication difficult. Though it grows



excellent alphonso mangoes, cashews, coconuts, beetle nuts and many exotic spices, the main crop of the ordinary farmers is paddy which is not adequate for sustenance. The region has excellent capacity to develop tourism and horticulture but this has hampered owing to lack of capital and also because most talented entrepreneurs of the region migrate to other parts for livelihood.

For over three centuries Konkan people have been migrating to the plateau across the Sahyadri or to Mumbai for livelihood. With the arrival of textile mills and other industries to Bombay, the major chunk of its workers came from the Konkan and thus the families back home could sustain on what came to be called the 'money-order-economy'. The ports in the Konkan had been from ancient times a gateway to the Maharashtra hinterlands. The maritime trade had flourished and luxury goods coming from Arabia and before that the Roman empire passed through these ports to Pratishthan (Paithan), Tagarpur and such other prosperous towns in the Godavari valley.

Owing to adverse geographical conditions, Konkan has lagged behind in industrial development and its economy is in poor shape. However, proximity with Mumbai has given it certain advantages. Educational and social reforms reached the region earlier and political awareness of the people is higher. It has produced several eminent leaders and statesmen such as Lokmanya Tilak, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Vinoba Bhave. The Peshwas who ruled the Maratha Kingdom for about a century had migrated from Konkan to Satara and then to Pune in the late 17th century. Many Marathi literary stalwarts, poets, painters and theatre artists trace their origin to this region. Konkan also boasts of a long folk theatre tradition still practiced with great élan which has generously contributed to the vibrant modern Marathi Theatre.

Except for the Southern Thane district and the Western

Raigad, there is little presence of industries in Konkan. In recent decades, closeness to Mumbai has benefitted these districts most. Thane and Panvel cities have now become the satellite townships of Mumbai. Industries have developed in pockets adjoining Mumbai while the distant hilly and rural areas still slumber in underdeveloped conditions. Thane, Panvel, Pen have had the advantage of receiving the spillover from Mumbai's industrial saturation. The twin city of New Mumbai falls in Raigad district which witnessed recently a boom in petro-chemical and chemical industries creating jobs and infrastructure. Similarly, Thane has become the second-most busy industrial centre of the state. Large areas of Thane and Raigad districts have been swallowed by metropolitan Mumbai and New Mumbai which together is threatening to become a mammoth megalopolis. Nearly a quarter of the total population of Maharashtra now lives in this industrial hub.

#### **Western Maharashtra or the Deccan**

The six districts of Pune, Ahmednagar, Satara, Sangli, Kolhapur and Sholapur together with four districts of Khandesh namely Dhule, Nandurbar, Nasik and Jalgaon make the Western Maharashtra; in essence a region where Shivaji was active in his endeavour to establish 'swaraj'. The four districts of North and Sholapur stand apart from the distinct homogenous culture of Satara, Sangli and Kolhapur. The latter three districts were parts of princely states, particularly of the Bhosale descendants of Shivaji. Pune was the seat of the Peshwas and Ahmednagar the capital of the *Adilshahee* which changed hands from the Nizams to the Marathas and back several times in history.

Nevertheless, by and large, the people of this area prominently display certain common characteristics which make them stand apart from the rest of the people in the state. Generally, the people here are politically "smart",

resourceful, socially and economically innovative, enterprising and modernised. Shivaji had dissolved most of the 'zamindari' system introducing instead the progressive '*rayatwari*' system of land holding with the result that the land holding pattern in the region is far advanced than in Vidarbha or Marathwada. After independence and after formation of the linguistic state, the land reform measures were also pursued vigorously. Very large holdings of land and traditional '*zamindari*' system is nearly absent in this area which cannot be said about Vidarbha and Marathwada.

The British had introduced the local-self-government institutions and education comparatively much earlier in this part. The urban elite of Western Maharashtra, particularly of the city of Pune, has been on the forefront of the freedom movement till the emergence of Gandhi in 1920 producing several leaders of national stature. Partly on account of the demographic advantage and partly owing to their historic experience of governance and politics, the Marathas of this region have dominated the process of governance and politics of the state ever since the formation of linguistic Maharashtra.

Innovativeness and enterprise is abundantly evident among the peasants who brought about the green revolution and promoted cooperative processing industries, particularly the sugar cooperatives. The latter have triggered a rapid process of development and growth in the rural Maharashtra. Though a network of dams and canal systems, partly available from the pre-independence days and partly created after Maharashtra was formed, has facilitated this growth, the hard-working determination of the peasants coupled with imaginative political leadership has been a significant factor. Besides the sugar mills, the region also witnessed good growth in horticulture, dairy farming, poultry, and floriculture and allied cottage industries. The

purchasing power of the peasants of Kolhapur and Sangli districts is among the highest in the rural areas of India. Massive modern departmental stores do brisk business even at taluka places in these districts.

In this context, it is interesting to note that this region is considered to be the bastion of the dominant Maratha caste of Maharashtra. While the average proportion of the Marathas in Maharashtra is between 35 and 38 per cent of the total population, in Western Maharashtra districts, it is four to five per cent higher. Marathas have been swordsmen as also rulers and chieftains controlling the rural economy for centuries. Among the several former princely states of the region, the rulers of Kolhapur and Satara were the direct descendants of Shivaji respected by people all over Maharashtra. Political awareness of the Marathas, whether aristocrats, landowners or landless peasants, is far higher than that of the other castes. In addition to Marathas, Western Maharashtra has a fair population of *Malis*, considered to be very skilled and progressive farmers and *Dhangars*, another agricultural caste with a hard-working temperament. The green revolution and the cooperative miracle is supposed to have been engineered by these castes.

Formation of Maharashtra gave a boost to industrial development of the Pune metropolitan region. The Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation's schemes are more effectively received by the people here and several large industrial zones are working efficiently. Today the city of Pune is a prominent industrial hub and among the leaders of information technology in India. Automobile industry and heavy engineering and tools industry has also transformed the face of Pune which once was described as the city of pensioners.

Besides Pune, the cities of Ahmednagar, Sangli, Kolhapur and small townships developed around cooperative ventures such as Pravaranagar, Karad and

Gargoti are fast emerging as bustling educational centres. In terms of surface communication too, Western Maharashtra is well placed compared to other areas. As mentioned earlier, Maharashtra as a whole generally lacks the spirit of entrepreneurship. Among others, Tilak had recognised this weakness a century ago and had encouraged the local people to set up their own industries and business houses. Some of the Maharashtrian industrial houses known outside the state such as Kirloskars, Garwares, Ogales etc. owe their inspiration to Tilak.

Naturally, people from this region are on the forefront removing this sociological lacuna in Maharashtra's ambience. If Western Maharashtra appears more prosperous today than other regions of the state, a combination of many factors—economic, historical, political and sociological—is responsible for this. But no less important is the energy, hard-working nature, innovative acumen and creative spirit of the people of the region.

The four districts of Khandesh in the North are a bit different from the rest of Western Maharashtra. Nasik has been an ancient holy town, a seat of learning and a place of pilgrimage. In modern times too it has evolved into a centre of education and a hub of industrial development. The rural portions of the districts of Dhule, Nandurbar and Jalgaon have a distinct dialect. The proportion of the scheduled tribes in population is higher than in the other districts of the region.

Dhule and Jalgaon are watered by Tapi river while Godavari, which has its origin at Tryambakeshwar, a few kilometers North-West of Nasik city serves the Nasik district. All the three districts have rich fertile soil. Jalgaon produces cotton in abundance. The triangle is known for producing banana, grapes and onions. Barring northern hilly belts of Satpura, the three districts are served reasonably by rail and road communications.

### **Marathwada**

Eight districts South-East of Western Maharashtra constitute the Marathwada region—Aurangabad, Jalna, Parbhani, Beed, Latur, Usmanabad, Hingoli and Nanded. These were part of Nizam's princely state of Hyderabad and were physically cut off from Maharashtra for a long time till the police action of 1948 when that state was incorporated in the Indian Union. The region falls in the fertile valley of Godavari where ancient dynasties flourished and Marathi culture evolved. Many historians regard Marathwada as the ancient core of Marathi culture even if the region remained away from Maharashtra for centuries. As a consequence, political and social reform movements in this region were weak. Educational development was perfunctory and industrial activities negligible.

The dominant political community in the Hyderabad state are the Muslims although the Hindus were in overwhelming majority just as they were in Marathwada. The relations between the Hindus and the Muslims were cordial till 1935 when the national freedom struggle in India found echoes in the state. The Nizam who was determined to remain independent when the national movement intensified elsewhere banned the activities of the State Congress. The conflict soured the communal relations. Tensions rose when a Muslim communal organisation supported Nizam's intention to carve out a sovereign state of Hyderabad. A fanatic from Latur in Marathwada, Kasim Rizvi, organised a semi-military organisation called 'Razakar' and engineered widespread communal violence in Marathwada targeting Hindus with the support of the state. In turn, after liberation, Razakars were targeted by the local militant Hindu organisations.

This brief chapter of recent history has a bearing on Marathwada's character. The communal relations have returned to previous harmony, though. The movement for

a separate linguistic state of Andhra, which triggered the process of linguistic re-organisation of the states all over India, made the Marathi speaking people of Marathwada realise that their destiny lay with Maharashtra. The region thus was joined with other Marathi speaking regions for the first time after centuries in 1956 when the bilingual state of Bombay was formed. But this was accomplished not without a vibrant mass agitation led by Swami Ramanand Tirth, a hero of freedom movement. The older generations of Marathwada have had their education in Urdu medium. Even today, there are many who boast of a sound knowledge of Urdu and Urdu poetry.

Owing to lack of development there had been little urbanisation in Marathwada till the late 60s. Large landholders and aristocratic 'vatandars' prevailed during the Nizam's regime. The caste hierarchy was strong with 'blue-blooded' Deshmukh Marathas ruthlessly wielding economic and social power in the rural areas. It took some time for the spread of education to make an impact. The whole of Marathwada was declared 'backward' by the Maharashtra government for offering incentives to industries. Although, this policy has made some impact, industrialisation has been slow and confined mostly to towns like Aurangabad, Nanded and Latur. Marathwada is still struggling to come out of its comparatively underdeveloped status.

The generous water resources of the region were not harnessed during the Nizam's period. Maharashtra government has tried to remove this deficiency and completion of Jayakwadi dam on river Godavari near Paithan and several medium and minor irrigation schemes have given a spurt to agriculture though much remains to be done and there still is a large backlog to be overcome. The major crop of the region is jowar and at one time Marathwada was described as the grainery of jowar, the finest varieties being traditionally produced here.

Marathwada farmers have been quick to learn from their western brethren. Several cooperative sugar factories in Aurangabad, Jalana, Parbhani and Nanded districts have begun to change the face of rural Marathwada. However, western segments of Aurangabad, Beed, Latur and Usmanabad districts fall in the rain-shadow belt and continue to be drought prone. Recently, severity and frequency of droughts has lessened to some extent. A large number of marginal farmers in Aurangabad, Parbhani Beed and Usmanabad districts continue to migrate to neighbouring districts of Ahmednagar, Satara, Sangli and Kolhapur as unskilled labour during the sugar-cutting season.

The harsh *zamindari* system and the orthodox caste hierarchy of the past, communal violence before and after liberation and caste violence against dalits following the naming of Marathwada University of Aurangabad after Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in 1978 have brought about substantial demographic changes in the region. Many Muslims and dalits migrated to cities and urban centres. Marathwada has been a bastion of a powerful *dalit* movement. Incidentally, during the last three decades, it has also witnessed a vibrant literary upsurge with some commentators remarking that the cultural-literary epicenter of Maharashtra has now shifted from Pune to Aurangabad.

### Vidarbha

Vidarbha today comprises Nagpur and *Warhad* (*Berar*) regions which historically have lived in separate political dispensations for a long time, have different climatic and geographical environments with subtle differences in socio-cultural and linguistic nuances of the people. Nevertheless there are broad common characteristics, physical and social, which justify bunching them together in the common denomination. Amravati, Akola, Buldhana, Yavatmal and Washim districts make *Warhad* which lived under the rule

of Nizam till 1860 when these were forked out to the British by the former in lieu of mounting debts. The British incorporated these districts in the then Central Province which already had Marathi-speaking districts of East Vidarbha. These are Nagpur, Bhandara, Gondia, Chandrapur, Gadchiroli and Wardha. The Central province then was known as C.P. & Berar. Some observers believe that the Vidarbha mentioned in the Mahabharata and Puranas probably meant the Amravati region. A few kilometers East of Amravati is an ancient place named Kaundinyapur from where Lord Krishna is supposed to have spirited away Rukhmini, the beautiful daughter of King Rukhmi of Vidarbha.

The land holding system here is different from that in the west. There were *Malguzars* in the Nagpur region who used to control the economy of the village and had the right of the water reservoirs. *Jahagirdars* and *zamindars* in Warhad owned thousands of hectares of land. After the Maharashtra state was formed, land reforms began to be implemented vigorously. The proportion of castes too is slightly different in Vidarbha. The Marathas have power but they are not a dominant group all over. The Maratha-kunbis account for 26 per cent of the population and form the largest segment. But there are also other powerful castes such as *Telis* who now fall in the OBC category whose total share in the population is 36.75 per cent. On the other hand, the Scheduled Castes component is nearly 20 per cent and the Scheduled Tribes 14.89 per cent. Thus, dalits and tribals together also form a big segment of over 34 per cent. This difference explains a totally different electoral arithmetic of this region.

The region is rich in natural resources and is blessed with assured monsoon fall. It has a rich black cotton soil in the Warhad segment and reddish one in Nagpur region. The soil in the eastern region is good for sumptuous rice

harvest and horticulture peculiar to the eastern belt. Vidarbha is watered by rivers Purna, Wardha, Wainganga, Painganga and Pranahita. Cotton, jowar, paddy, pulses such as tur and a variety of oil seeds are easily grown. The soil is so fertile and generous that it does not demand too hard and taxing labour from the peasants.

Droughts are rare and never so harsh as in Marathwada and Western Maharashtra. The kind nature thus has made the VidarbHITE of relaxed and easy - going disposition. This persists in modern times too. Vidarbhites scoff at competitive aggressiveness. Consequently, they have lagged behind in the race for development and political power. Despite the massive crop of cotton and oranges, Vidarbha hardly ever had a respectable processing industry, neither cooperative nor private. It is not picking up on this count at a leisurely pace.

Sizable deposits of Coal, limestone, iron ore, manganese, bauxite are found in Chandrapur, Nagpur, Bhandara, Wardha and Yavatmal districts the mining activity attracting workers from all over India. Industrial development was sparse till 1956. Apart from mining, there were a few textile mills in Nagpur and Amravati districts and some ginning, pressing and processing factories. Of late, Nagpur, Chandrapur and Bhandara districts have been attracting several major industrial units.

Although modern education had a late start, formation of linguistic Maharashtra witnessed a rapid spread of educational activities. Political awareness increased in these parts with the formation of the Congress. Tilak had many ardent followers in these parts prominent among them being M.S. Aney and B.G. Khaparde. By the time Gandhi emerged, the region had plunged into the struggle. Many educated youths set up 'akhadas' (gymnasias) to supply able-bodied men to the struggle. They were also attracted to the radical revolutionary culture of the Bengal. One such Congress

youth was Keshav Baliram Hedgewar who in 1925, established the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) which soon spread its network all over India. The RSS headquarters are in Nagpur.

Nagpur was the capital of Central Province & Berar and later of Madhya Pradesh before Vidarbha was merged with the bilingual Mumbai State. On formation of Maharashtra it was accorded the status of 'second capital' in accordance with an agreement known as the Nagpur Pact between the leaders of Western Maharashtra and Vidarbha in 1953 to facilitate formation of Maharashtra. The aim was to neutralise reservations of political leaders from Vidarbha and Marathwada by providing special measures to remove development imbalance in these two regions. The state assembly now holds its winter session in Nagpur when most of the government camps there for about a month.

## ANTIQUITY

Nearly three lakh years ago, the climate in the region which constitutes Maharashtra today was much arid and the land was quite barren. Rainfall was frugal and rivers shallow. Archaeologists wondered whether the pre-historic man had any presence in the region. However, recent excavations have yielded evidence that the stone age man indeed roamed over most river valleys of the plateau such as Godavari, Vainganga, Krishna, Tapi, Purna, Painganga, Wardha, Pravara, Bhima and Mula-Mutha. A wide range of Stone Age tools is found in these valleys indicating that the region was teeming with pre-historic man wandering from place to place in search of game and food. Archaeological evidence also suggests that these people had cultural contacts with the people of South and Central India. Some of the Neolithic traits of the people of this region came from the North and some from the South. That Maharashtra has been a cultural meeting ground of the North and the South from the hoary past is born by evidence.

Eventually, the rainfall increased giving rise to abundant vegetation. Persistent whipping of rains over many millennia rendered the lava rocks into a fertile black soil. The rivers deepened and games for hunting increased. Subsistence becoming easier with availability of food, the population increased. Wandering groups of men and women, living mainly on hunting, began to settle in the fertile valleys some 15 to 20,000 years ago. By 2000 to 1700

B.C. farming communities had emerged in Tapi, Godavari, Pravara and Bhima valleys. Small settlements of villages began to surface. Some of the settlements were large with a population of around 1000. Evidence of these "towns" is found near Prakash in Dhule district, Daimabad in Ahmednagar and Inamgaon in Pune.

### Jorwe Culture

Then came the first civilization or culture of the region, around 1500 BC. An excavation at Jorwe in Ahmednagar district has yielded large collection of painted pottery of a distinct variety, tools and ornaments of copper and a blade-flake industry of chalcedony. The Jorwe culture, as it is now named, had its distinct identity. The Jorwe people are said to have colonised most of the Maharashtra region except Konkan. They had thatched roof rectangular houses and had bins and pit silos to store grains. They practiced crop rotation.

The period between 8th Century B.C. and 3rd century B.C. is a mystery for archaeologists for lack of evidence. A settlement of Megalithic period is found near Nagpur. But this was an extension of a people from South India who rode horses and wielded superior iron weapons. No evidence of this culture is found elsewhere in Maharashtra. This was an important period in the North, when the powerful Maurya and Sung dynasties were at the zenith of glory. Samrat Asoka did make an impact on Maharashtra as monuments of Asokan edicts found at the two extreme ends of Maharashtra reveal—Deotek (now Ramtek) near Nagpur and Sopara on the sea shore in Thane. Asoka is said to have taken a direct interest in propagation of Buddhism in these areas. The history of the region between Asokan period and the emergence of the Satavahana dynasty is again wrapped in mystery. The Sunga rule in the North did not have much presence in the region except on the

Eastern fringe of Bhanara where a few sculptures of the Sunga era are found.

### Satavahanas

The Satavahana dynasty, which moulded Maharashtra culture, emerged around second century B.C. Satavahanas were the first rulers whose kingdom occupied the entire peninsular India including Maharashtra, parts of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and most of Andhra country. Places like Paithan, Nasik, Nevasa, Kaudinyapur which are still found on Maharashtra's map, came into prominence. The Satavahanas ruled from Paithan (Pratishthan) on the banks of Godavari, a place of pilgrimage today.

Though many aspects of the Satavahana era are yet to be investigated, it is fairly certain that they originated in Maharashtra and ruled between 2nd Century B.C. and 3rd Century A.D. About 30 kings from this Brahmin dynasty are said to have ruled. Theirs was a mighty peninsular power spread on vast tracts from the Arabian Sea to the Bay of Bengal. Many foreign travellers have left glorious accounts of the Satavahana kingdom. During their rule, a steady traffic of goods emerged between the kingdom and countries across the Arabian sea and beyond including Rome through the ports of Kalyan and Chaul.

A variety of artifacts including beautiful Roman pottery, wine glasses and Roman coins found at many places in Maharashtra belong to this period. Art, architecture and literature flourished. Typical of the era are terracotta and beautiful kaolin figurines which have a distinct style known as Satavahana style. During the same era, the Buddhist caves at Bhaja, Karla, Kanheri and Nasik were carved. The Satavahana coins display Buddhist symbols. A notable relic of the era is a stupendous compendium of seven hundred verses called *Gathasaptashati* in Prakrit, an earlier form of Marathi, compiled by King Hala of the 1st Century B.C.



Not much is known about what caused Satavahanas decline. With a brief intervention of Kardamaka and Abhir dynasties, there followed the rule of Vakatakas, a dynasty founded by a feudatory lord of the Satavahanas, Vindhyashakti, around the 3rd century AD. Vakatakas, who ruled till the 6th century, are known for their matrimonial connection with the Gupta dynasty of the North. Chandragupta II gave his daughter Prabhavati in marriage to Rudrasen, grandson of Vindhyashakti.

The famous paintings of Ajanta caves no. 16 and 17, executed during the Vakataka period, mostly depict the rich and varied life of the people during the Vakataka era. Scholars believe that the famous poet Kalidasa wrote his classic *Meghadoota* when he lived at Ramtek in the same era. Vakatakas held sway over Vidarbha, parts of Chhattisgarh then called Kosala and some parts of Krishna valley in South Maharashtra. The seat of the dynasty probably was Vatsagulma in Vidarbha where most of the copper plates of the era are found.

#### **Ma-ha-la-chha**

By the end of the 6th century, there follows again a hazy period when the history of the region is not very clear till we encounter the Chalukyas of Badami (from Mysore, Karnataka) who claimed to have conquered the three "Maharashtrakas" the first reference to particular nomenclature. The Maharashtrakas referred are Vidarbha, Western Maharashtra and Konkan. Though originally from Karnataka, the Chalukya conqueror Pulakeshin II is described by the Chinese traveller *Huen Tsang* as the ruler of "Maharashtra"—Ma-ha-la-chha, as he calls it. *Huen Tsang*, who travelled around in Maharashtra by 641 AD when Pulakeshin II ruled, makes interesting observations in his travel account. Says the traveller, "...the soil is rich and fertile. It is regularly cultivated and very productive.

The climate is hot and disposition of the people honest and simple. They are tall of stature and of a stern vindictive character. To their benefactor, they are grateful, to the enemies, relentless. If insulted, they risk their lives to avenge themselves. If asked to help one in distress, they forget themselves in their haste to render assistance. They give warning if they are going to attack the enemy....."

*Huen Tsang* indicates that Pulakeshin, a powerful Kshtriya, was tolerant of other faiths. Buddhist sects Hinayana and Mahayana flourished during his reign. The Chalukyas had two spells of rule between A.D. 550-760 and from A.D. 973 to 1180. The first phase declined when a new Rashtrakuta dynasty emerged. Several Rashtrakuta houses ruled from different places such as Achalpur, Vatsagulma (Vidarbha), Nasik and Man in Satara. The intervening period witnessed frequent confrontations between the Chalukyas and the Rashtrakutas. Even so arts, culture and literature flourished during their period. The famous Kailash cave-temple of Ellora was sculpted during the reign of Rashtrakuta king, Krishna I. This period is considered a brilliant phase in the history of Maharashtra. Several inscriptions and copper plates underscore the glorious career of Rashtrakuta rulers notable among them Dantidurga whose exploits are depicted in the Dasavatara caves of Ellora.

Dantidurga had established his rule over large parts of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Vidarbha. Krishna I extended it to Southern Maharashtra. King Dhruva further extended the Rashtrakuta Empire with conquests in the North and the South and practically covered all parts that constitute Maharashtra today. Amoghavarsha, towards the end of the 9th century, patronised Hinduism and Jainism and encouraged compositions in Kannada. Indeed, that was the period when the linguistic boundaries were not sharply defined and different versions of Prakrit were in vogue. Apparently, people encountered little linguistic problems

while crossing over from Malwa in Madhya Pradesh to Vidarbha, Mahakosal, parts of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

Historians assert that after the Satavahanas, Rashtrakutas were the only power to hold sway over the entire Maharashtra region again. Not even the Mighty Yadavas of the later period could achieve this feat. Rashtrakutas patronised art, architecture and literature and distributed sumptuous grants for many causes. Arab writers who visited the Western shore for trade, pay high compliments to Rashtrakuta kings for their prosperity, sagacity and culture of tolerance. One of them, Masudi, says "... the troops and elephants of the Rashtrakutas were innumerable... The troops are mostly infantry because the seat of the government is among the mountains... here is none among the rulers of the Hind who in his territory respects the Muslims like Raja Ballahana. In his kingdom, Islam is honoured and protected..."

#### Golden Age of the Yadavas

By the end of the second spell of the Chalukya dynasty, there emerged several small principalities in different parts of Maharashtra. Notable among them were the Kalachuris of Marathwada and South Maharashtra and the Silahars of Karad in Satara who also ruled South Maharashtra and parts of coastal Konkan. It was not until the emergence of the Yadavas of Devagiri in the mid 12th century that the parts of Maharashtra again came under a single rule. More than any other regime, Maharashtra remembers the Yadavas as the harbingers of a golden age and forerunners of the Marathas who gave a distinct identity to the geographical entity that is Maharashtra.

Yadavas, the feudatories of the Rashtrakutas and the Chalukyas, ruled over a northern belt from Nasik and Khandesh to Devagiri near Aurangabad in the 10th century.

Of them King Bhillana threw away the shackles of the former kingdoms, conquered territory North and South, East and West and established his independent empire between 1185 and 1193. It is he who founded the capital at Devagiri, a city of such enormous riches that it soon lured the foreign rulers of Delhi. The Yadava dynasty, which lasted till 1317, produced several distinguished rulers such as Sanghana, Krishna, Mahadeva and Ramachandra. They defeated the Kandambas of Goa, vanquished the Silaharas in a naval battle, and dealt severe blows to the Paramaras of Madhya Pradesh, Vaghelas of Gujarat and Kakatiyas of Andhra. By the early 14th century, the Yadava rule extended deep into Mahakosala to the East, Balaghat and Malwa as also parts of Gujarat to the North and North-East, and substantial parts of Telugu and Kannada regions to the south.

For over a century, Maharashtra flourished under the Yadavas who practiced religious tolerance and gave patronage to Marathi language. Marathi was the court language of the Kingdom and it was under the Yadava regime that the great Marathi poet, saint Jnaneshwara wrote his epic commentary in Marathi now called *Jnaneshwari*. Jnaneshwar also consolidated the *Warkari* practice and the Bhakti cult focused on Lord Vothoba of Pandharpur. The Mahanubhava sect, which originated near Bhandara in the east under Chakradhar Swami, produced all its literature in Marathi during this period. King Singhana was known for his keen interest in astronomy and his love for music. Hemadri, prime minister to King Mahadeva and later to Ramadeva Raya (Ramchandra) was an erudite scholar and wrote treatise both in Sanskrit and Marathi. Himself an architect, Hemadri is credited with encouraging a distinctive style of temple architecture, described as *Hemadpanti* style. A large number of temples in Maharashtra belong to this style.

### Northern Storm

New winds were blowing in the north. Tumultuous happenings were radically transforming the political cultural map of Northern India. The sturdy warriors of West Asia, riding on tall horses and carrying religious flags along with long swords made of superior steel had swept through the North to establish a completely new rule. It was just after the legendary Ramachandra Yadava had extended his domain beyond Chandrapur and Balaghat districts in the East that the first Muslim foray from the North hit the Yadava kingdom. Allauddin Khalji descended South like a storm and sacked the Yadava capital Devagiri in 1294. Ramachandra had to pay a large booty in gold to save his throne. But only for a brief spell.

There followed another wave of Muslim forces led by the slave general of Allauddin, Malik Kafur in 1307. This time, as a vanquished vassal, Ramachandra had to help Kafur defeat Southern Hoyasalas. During the next foray, Kafur had a different agenda. He killed the Yadava king, Sankaradeva, in 1313. Allauddin's son Mubarak, who extended the Muslim rule deep into the South, killed the last Yadava ruler, Harapaladeva, in 1317. The Yadava era came to an end. Muslim governors appointed from Delhi administered the region. Devagiri became a part of the Delhi sultanate.

The Muslim invaders brought with them not only superior arms made of superior steel but also a different ruling culture so far unknown to the easy-going and tolerant life style of the sub-continent. They brought with them their architecture and their oppressive and stricter system of revenue collection. More importantly, they brought a new faith to which they were passionately committed. They did loot and raid and even killed the people in their initial forays to the south. But they were not mere marauders. They had come to settle down in this land.

Allauddin's successive waves of invasion shattered the economic and political strength of Maharashtra. The raiders killed people at will, devastated lands, sacked villages and towns and amassed fortunes in loot leaving behind a countryside completely stripped. Allauddin's successor in Delhi Ghiyasuddin Tughluq also trampled through the South. Muhammad Tughluq carried out further expansion and pushed the Muslim rule to the Southern tip of India. That gave him the idea of shifting his capital from Delhi to Deogiri which he did implement in 1329 causing great turmoil, bloodshed and administrative chaos. Within a year, the sultan gave up and abandoned Devagiri.

### The Deccan Bahamanis

There followed an interlude of two centuries when parts of Maharashtra were ruled by five segments of the Bahamani dynasty. The slave governor Zafarkhan, known as Hasan Gangu, took advantage of the chaos in Delhi caused by Muhammad Tughluq's tantrums and consecrated himself on the throne of Devagiri in 1347. A Deccani Musalman, he called himself Bahaman—Allauddin Bahaman Shah—who resented invaders of the North. He vanquished the remaining forces of Tughluq in the South and shifted his capital to Gulbarga. Though Bahamanis established their unquestioned rule over the Deccan vanquishing all and sundry rulers, their regime was thick with political intrigues, palace murders, bloody feuds and senseless family strife.

On occasions, the conflicts between the Deccani and non-Deccani Muslims took serious turns leading to large scale massacres. Non-Deccani Muslims were called *paradesis*, as they were mostly of Persian, Afghani and Turkey descent. By the time the Moguls established power in Delhi, the Deccan sultanate of the Bahamanis had become completely alienated from the north. By early 16th century, the sultanate split into five segments—Adil Shahi of Bijapur, Kutub Shahi

of Golconda, Nizam Shahi of Ahmednagar, Barid Shahi of Bidar and Imad Shahi of Achalpur.

During this chaotic period local Maratha chieftains came to fore and gained importance in political and military sphere. Though the Bahamanis were passionate adherents of Islam, they had to fend off the looting forays of Delhi sultans and in that endeavour the local Hindu Marathas became useful allies. Also, Bahamanis were essentially of Deccani origin and their culture was not different from those of the ruled. As rulers, they were undoubtedly oppressive and on occasions driven with religious fanaticism. But by and large, they were not regarded as 'foreigners'. Maratha chieftains had little difficulty in having alliances with them either as military generals or administrative governors. Thus there emerged powerful Maratha families of the new political class—Bhosale, More, Shirke, Mohite, Mane, Surve, Dafalay, Ghorpade and so on.

Shahaji Bhosale, son of a 'watandar' with a modest armed force at his command, belonged to this category, at times serving the Ahmednagar Nizam Shahi and at other the Adil Shahi of Bijapur, depending on the fortunes and demands of the Shahs. The great kingdom of Vijayanagar, the last bastion of the local resistance, had fallen in the 16th century. Some Maratha chieftains had served the Vijayanagar. They easily switched loyalties to protect their 'watans'. Shahaji, one of them, was different in many respects. He kept his wife, Jijabai, away from campaigns. And when she gave birth to a son, he bequeathed on him a small *jhagir* of Pune and appointed for him a stern Brahmin teacher, Dadoji Kondev, who was equally well-versed in military and political affairs as in the religious shastras. Jijabai was a proud woman fully aware of social and political turbulence in the land. It is she who is supposed to have ignited the spark of freedom in her young son, Shivaji.

5

## SHIVAJI—THE SPARK OF FREEDOM

It is but rarely in human history that the genius of one man can transform an insipid mass of society, long used to languishing in slavery, into a powerful force of a spirited people who would fight fiercely for freedom from bondage and for their dignity and honour. Shivaji, the son of Shahaji Bhosale, an influential mansabdar in the courts of the Bahamanis, accomplished this metamorphosis when Maharashtra was passing through its darkest age in recent history. He breathed among the common people, oppressed for centuries by despotic rulers, the spirit of freedom and a consciousness of their identity, leaving a lasting impact on the history of the Indian sub-continent. Indeed, many historians believe that Shivaji was a surprise of history who ushered in a social and political revolution that almost transformed the temperament of the people as a whole.

Having won the love and loyalty of the people, Shivaji could successfully confront at a very young age the mighty Moguls at the zenith of their power, the Bahamani kingdoms of the south, the Portuguese in Goa and many local chieftains simultaneously to carve out a kingdom of his own. It was not a kingdom sought for mere power and riches. His people and contemporary chroniclers, including those in the courts of his adversaries, describe him as a 'people's king'—*lokancha Raja*. Shivaji himself describes his kingdom as *swarajya* (self-rule), a term which became much popular three centuries later during India's freedom struggle under

Mahatma Gandhi. People, the ordinary farmers and commoners were the focus of his administration. And looking far ahead of his times, Shivaji thought of the concept of a 'welfare state' (*kalyanakaari Rajya*) and tried to implement it in his own way.

### **Maharashtra Dharma**

A man of vision, extraordinary statesman, brilliant military strategist, astute organiser of men and sagacious administrator, Shivaji was among the first to articulate Maratha nationalism, 'Maharashtra Dharma', not in its narrow sense but as a first step to give a distinct political identity to the people of the entire sub-continent. 'Dharma' in this usage certainly does not mean religion. It refers to the way of life of the people of Maharashtra. What lends an extraordinary significance to Shivaji's meteoric rise is the fact that he accomplished these feats when everywhere in the Indian sub-continent and without exception, the local kingdoms and principalities were crumbling like nine pins before the superior arms of the mighty alien rulers. Like scores of other Maratha chieftains, Shivaji could have continued to serve the Moguls or the Bahamanis and amass massive wealth as many did. But Shivaji chose a different course. He fought to throw these rulers out and coronated himself as a king. Such was his sense of history that he was the first Maratha king to issue a gold coin *shivarai hon* in his name and to establish a new calendar—*Raj Shaka*—to usher in a new royal era.

There is another facet to the character of this great man which the historians and contemporary chroniclers repeatedly emphasise. Shivaji was undoubtedly a proud Hindu and his coronation ceremony strictly adhered to the Vedic rituals. But his politics was essentially secular, if a modern term were to be used. Completely bereft of a religious fanatic streak, Shivaji respected other religions like his own, venerated Muslim saints and peers—as indeed has

been the great tradition in rural Maharashtra which continues till this day—employed Mussalmans in his administration as in army and navy. A number of his bodyguards were Muslims. Setu Mahavrao Pagadi, the noted historian, asserts "...It is no surprise to students of Maratha documents that in Shivaji's papers there is practically no reference to the religion of his adversaries. The word Mussalman does not occur in his letters. It is always the Moguls, Turks, Pathans, Abyssynians but never Muslims." As Pagadi points out the significance of this emphasis on ethnic aspects as against religious aspects of the problem (that Shivaji confronted) should not be lost sight of. Three hundred years after his death, people of Maharashtra and India continue to draw inspiration from the many-splendored genius of this great hero because in an age of darkness, he restored in them the dignity, honour and the spirit of freedom with a will to fight for it.

Born on February 19th of 1630, Shivaji was bequeathed by his father Shahaji a small fiefdom of Pune and Supe at a very early age. Most of the time Shahaji was away on military campaigns for either the Adil Shah or the Nizam Shah and it was Shivaji's mother, Jijabai, who looked after his upbringing ably assisted by his teacher, Dadoji Konddeo. Jijabai was a woman of great will power and deeply troubled and restless on account of the conditions prevailing in the country at that time. Historians believe that it was Jijabai who inspired her son to strive to change the depressing reality. Shivaji's first exploit at the age of 16 was to capture the fort of *Torna*, a strategic point for the defense of his *jhagir*. It soon became clear that the young man had a method, a blue-print and a definite objective in his dare-devilry. He was out to make the perimeter of his fiefdom secure from any intervention from outside, a bold and rebellious venture which would invite the wrath of both the Bahamanis and the Moguls.

### Guerilla Strategist

It is not possible to recount the story of Shivaji's amazing life in this book. We can only touch the important milestones in his journey towards independence, to secure a sovereign kingdom, 'swarajya' for his people. Shivaji captured old forts and built new ones in his father's 'jagir.' He displayed very early the understanding of the statecraft by demonstrating that not mere revenue collection but judicious administration was the principal activity of a ruler. Soon the fame of this different king spread in the length and breadth of Maharashtra and beyond. The Maratha chieftains, who refused to follow these policies and opposed Shivaji were vanquished. First the Bijapur and later the Moguls sent their legendary military generals to nip this rebellion in the bud. But such was Shivaji's remarkable military genius, that he vanquished them one by one... Afzal Khan, Shahiste Khan, Mahabat Khan, Diler Khan....

By that time, Shivaji had made his reputation as a leader of the people, a skilled guerilla fighter and a formidable military strategist. He rarely fought pitched battles with the standing armies of the adversaries. To begin with, his troops comprised mostly of the hardy peasants of the *Maval* valley, a tough mountainous region which no alien invader had succeeded in subduing. They were simple farmers who knew how to ride a horse. By temperament they were fiercely independent. For the love of Shivaji and for the cause he espoused, they put away their ploughs and took to swords. Within no time, Shivaji had won their admiration and loyalty and made them fight the mighty Moguls whose battle-hardened troops were armed to the teeth. But the *Mavala* soldiers were supreme in the hills and rugged valleys of the region as they instinctively knew the techniques of guerilla warfare. It was as if Shivaji had created an army out of nowhere.

But Shivaji also understood his own limitations. When Aurangzeb enraged by Shivaji's 'nuisance' sent a large force under Mirza Raja Jai Singh to discipline 'that mountain rat', Shivaji was realistic enough to understand his own weakness and struck a compromise. A humiliating treaty was imposed under which Shivaji had to surrender major forts to Moguls. There followed a forced visit to Aurangzeb's court in Agra where he was offered a potentate far away from Maharashtra. Shivaji, knowing that it was a scheme to cut him off his people, refused. While in Aurangzeb's court, he demanded to be treated with due respect. When that was not forthcoming, he withdrew to save his dignity. He was promptly put under house arrest. And when intrigues against him thickened and Agra became too hot for him, Shivaji escaped from detention, a miraculous escape whereby hangs a great legend.

On return to Maharashtra, Shivaji recaptured his forts and territory and on June 6th, 1674, got himself coronated at fort Raigad, declaring his sovereignty, independence from both the Moguls and the Bijapur. He was the first Maratha sovereign leader subservient neither to the Moguls of Delhi nor the sultans of the Deccan. Thereafter, he was called the *Chhatrapati*, the ruler. Later, he turned his attention to Karnataka and made several regions of south India a part of his sovereign kingdom. He died at the young age of 50 in 1680. The goal of 'swarajya' was not only realised, it was placed on a stable and solid foundations.

### People's King

It is not merely his valor, his daring feats and his amazing military conquests that make Shivaji a legend and a venerable icon that he is. As said earlier, Shivaji symbolised the spirit of manly independence which Maharashtra, and indeed the whole sub-continent, had lost during the previous several centuries. He was truly a people's king and the

people regarded him as such. Shivaji's greatness lies in the humanistic ideals he stood for and judicious principles of governance he espoused. Historian J.V.Naik captures in a capsule the cardinal principles of Shivaji's administration written down by his prime minister, Ramchandrapant Amatya: i. to promote the well-being of his people and general welfare of the state; ii. to maintain an efficient military force to defend Swarajya and iii. to provide adequately for the economic needs of the people by encouraging agriculture and industry.

Undoubtedly, Shivaji was a far-sighted leader and yet he had to work within the constraints of his time. He could understand the evils of caste system and yet could not even think of abolishing it as a sovereign Hindu king. But he had his own way of diluting its poisonous impact. The saint poets had fiercely attacked the evils of caste system; but that criticism was not expected to bring about a social revolution on the ground. At the most, it promoted a spiritual and intellectual unity. Shivaji took a step forward. He conscientiously recruited people of all castes in various levels of administration giving each caste much needed importance and status as also a specific responsibility in the *swarajya*. The Mahars and Mangs, the 'untouchables' lowest in the caste structure, were entrusted the responsibility of holding the hill forts. They, along with Ramoshis and Kolis, always accompanied Shivaji either as bodyguards or vanguards in his daring raids and hazardous missions. Marathas and Dhangars formed the bulk of his armed force.

Shivaji was the first Indian ruler of his era to realise the importance of the sea routes and formed his own Naval force with the help of the Agris and Bhandaris, coastal martial communities. Marathas, Prabhus and Brahmins were made civil and military officials. Perhaps, for the first time in centuries, the people grasped the idea that they may belong to different castes but they had a common nationality.

Another radical departure from the past was Shivaji's policy of giving land to the tiller. He did not so much as abolish the *zamindari* system as a whole. But he did put an end to the *watan*, the system of passing on the royal endowments of land or administrative posts from father to son. Hereditary posts and positions were abolished. No assignments of revenue or land were allowed for the army service. He discontinued the hereditary *jagir* system and converted these assignments in paid jobs. Peasants' fields were carefully measured and recorded. The revenue fixed was not only not excessive but also provided a relative relief for the peasants. He also appointed a cabinet of eight ministers—*Ashta Pradhan Mandal*—to advise him on affairs of state.

Such was the breadth of Shivaji's vision that while on the one hand he paid close attention to military campaigns and welfare-oriented administration, on the other he initiated a project to purify and reform the Marathi language of the court which, during the previous few centuries, was heavily infested with Persian and Turkey and had almost become unrecognizable, far removed from the language of the peasants and of Jnaneshwar, Tukaram and Ramdas. It had also become incomprehensible to the common folk. The project culminated into the *Rajya-Vyavahara Kosh*, an encyclopedia of words/jargon used in administration and correspondence. Thus, among many things, modern Maharashtra owes its rich and sophisticated language not to a small extent to the vision of Shivaji the great.

Shivaji began with a tiny 'jagir' of Pune provided by his father. Before he reached the age of fifty, he had extended his *swarajya* from the Arabian Sea to the river Bhima and beyond to the east, from river Godavari in the north to Kaveri in the south. The impact of Shivaji and the spirit he breathed in the people could be gauged by a 27-year long battle that the masses waged against the full might of the Mogul forces after Shivaji's death. Emperor Aurangzeb,



distressed with the continued turmoil in the South even after Shivaji's death, himself had descended into the Deccan in 1689 to put out the Maratha rebellion once and for all. That was nine years after the death of Shivaji. The Maratha people, first under Chhatrapati Sambhaji, Shivaji's first son, and then under Rajaram, the second son, waged a life and death war against the emperor.

### Unique Place in History

After Rajaram's death, his wife took up the standard and carried on the war. By all accounts, it was a people's war of independence against a tyrant emperor, a truly glorious chapter in the history of Maharashtra. Aurangzeb stayed in the Deccan for 18 years determined to vanquish the Marathas. But he died a frustrated man in 1707 near Aurangabad, his campaign unfulfilled, his mighty army humiliated and in disarray. The free spirit of the Marathas remained unvanquished and victorious.

Thus Shivaji has a unique place in the history of India because of his multi-faceted contribution, the depth and meaning of his *swarajya*, his people-oriented administration, his rebellion against degenerate traditions, his daring political aspirations, and, above all, the spirit of freedom and nationalism that he imparted to the people. Contemporary foreign observers, chroniclers and latter day historians have all acknowledged the greatness of this fine human being in no uncertain terms. Justice Mahadeo Govind Ranade, who ushered in a kind of renaissance in the last decades of the 19th century Maharashtra, musing over the forces and the contemporary ambience of Maharashtra which produced a personality like Shivaji, observes, "...like the Protestant Reformation in Europe in the sixteenth century, there was a religious, social and literary revival and reformation in India, but notably in the Deccan in the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries. This religious revival

was not Brahmanical in its orthodoxy; it was heterodox in spirit of protest against forms and ceremonies and class distinctions based on birth, and ethical in its preference of a pure heart, and of the law of love to all other acquired merits and good works..."

Sri Jadunath Sarkar writes, "..... He (Shivaji) was truly an original explorer, the maker of a new road in medieval Indian history, with no example or guide before him. When he chose to declare his independence, the Mogul empire seemed to be at the zenith of its glory. Every local chief who had, anywhere in India, revolted against it had been crushed. For a small *jagirdar's* son to defy its power appeared as an act of madness, a courting of sure ruin. Shivaji, however, chose this path and succeeded..... His success can be explained only by an analysis of his political genius....."

The contemporary foreign observers of the scene, English, French, Dutch, Portuguese, Italian and even the chroniclers of the Mogul and Bijapur courts, have nothing but words of admiration and awe for Shivaji. Some of them, for example, Aungier, compare him to Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great, King Hannibal and so on. Their accounts bear testimony to Shivaji's magnetic personality and his versatile and creative genius as a war strategist, far-sighted statesman and able and benevolent ruler. The latter-day historians compare him to Napoleon.

During the people's war of independence against Mogul forces led personally by Aurangzeb, Marathas lost Sambhaji and Rajaram, the two sons of Shivaji. Maratha power split into two segments, Tarabai, Rajaram's wife established a separate throne at Kolhapur and Shahu, Sambhaji's son, after his release from Mogul captivity, established himself at Satara. Soon Shahu bequeathed the prime ministership (1713) on Balaji Vishwanath, a brave Brahmin from Konkan who had supported Shahu against the Kolhapur throne set up by Tarabai for her minor son.

That was a turning point in Maratha history for Shahu had made the position of Peshwa (prime minister) a hereditary one. Within no time, the Peshwas concentrated all power in their hands rendering the Chhatrapati a mere titular head. Peshwas shifted their capital to Pune which soon became the focus of all political activity.

Aurangzeb's Deccan campaign proved very costly for the Mogul empire which, though at the zenith of its power and glory, had been showing signs of decay. The empire was too wide spread—from Kabul and Kandahar to Jinji in Tamilnadu and from Bengal to Gujarat across the sub-continent. It was Aurangzeb's superb administrative genius, his terror and discipline that kept the empire together. The court, however, was thick with intrigues. Aurangzeb was proud of his Turk lineage and looked down with contempt upon the Muslims of local origin. That was why his campaigns against the Deccani Muslims were more ferocious than against the 'rats like Shivaji'. All the prize posts in his court and military went to Turks, Persians, Abyssinians and Afghans. There was a great deal of back-stabbing between the Muslims officers of foreign and the local origin.

The tradition set by Akbar the Great of employing the local Hindu chieftains to high military and administrative posts in the court was abandoned by Aurangzeb. Raja Mirza Jai Singh's was the last family which had retained its position from the time of Shahjahan. Aurangzeb's discriminatory treatment of Hindus, imposition of special jaziya tax on them had caused a great deal of resentment and discontent among the masses. The Hindu noblemen in his court like the Mirza could not remain free from this turmoil. This, it was not surprising that Aurangzeb's death triggered a chaotic crumbling of the mighty Mogul empire creating a yawning political vacuum in the sub-continent.

Only the Marathas were capable of filling that void. And they did it with zest. For the next hundred years, the

Peshwas of Pune remained the major power of India who even controlled the weakened Mogul throne in Delhi for a while. History had thrown a golden opportunity before the Peshwas. But sadly, the Peshwas displayed an utter lack of a broader perspective, little sense of history and practically no understanding of the political turmoil in the sub-continent. The ideals of Shivaji's 'swarajya' and welfare-orientation of his administration were squandered away by them in a short time.

### Peshwa's Rule

The second Peshwa, Bajirao I, a daring military adventurer, expanded the frontiers of Maratha Raj in the north and went up to Attock. Within a few decades, powerful Maratha commanders set up their near sovereign potentates in the territories they captured—Scindias (Shindes) of Gwalior, Gaikwads of Baroda, Holkars of Indore, Bhosale's of Nagpur. But beyond that, wherever Maratha soldiers went, they did not go as conquerors seeking to spread the ideals of 'swarajya', revamping the administration and ensuring discipline; they went just as marauders and looters striking terror and resentment in the hearts of the local people.

The revolutionary reforms introduced by Shivaji, such as scrapping of large-scale land-holding and abolition of the system of hereditary positions in the administration and the military, were all undone by the Peshwas. Most castes other than Brahmins were treated by the Peshwas with contempt. Even the Marathas were unhappy with their Brahmin masters. The 'untouchables' were the worst sufferers. Historians sadly observe that Peshwas totally lacked the administrative acumen. And worse, they were no institution builders.

The third Peshwa, Balaji Bajirao, saw the Maratha power at its zenith. However, historians conclude that he was not capable of taking any steps for rendering this widely

extended dominion advantageous to the people'. Another historian from Pune observes,

"...Peshwa had no other principle of politics than the monetary or territorial gains of the principality of Pune which was regarded by him as nothing less or nothing more than his private estate." The Maratha chiefs of the distant principalities started treating the Peshwa just as the latter did to his master, the Chhatrapati. There was no central authority.

V.K. Rajwade, a veteran historian who is highly respected in Maharashtra, has very harsh words for the Peshwa rule. He writes, "The Marathas failed to effect adequate measures to consolidate the territories conquered between A.D. 1720 and 1760. The Peshwa did not evolve any institution to maintain an understanding and unity among the sardars..... The Maratha power was retained by force and cunning. The non-Maratha Hindus classed the Peshwas with Muslim raiders... (at the time of the battle of panipat—1761) the whole of India looked daggers at Marathas."

While the degenerate Maratha power refused to grasp the historic opportunity of dominating and ruling over the entire sub-continent, another player lurking in the wings knew better. Winds of change were sweeping the world. Following the renaissance and the beginnings of the industrial revolution, European sea-faring nations had acquired new technologies, new means of communication and newer, deadlier arms. Indian rulers, least of all the Peshwas, had neither the inkling of nor any curiosity about what was happening around the world. The Portuguese, Dutch, French and English, they all came to the sub-continent in search of spices, to expand their trade and make money.

It is said that the English came to India as mere traders and stumbled upon an empire inadvertently in a fit of

forgetfulness. There is no doubt that the East India Company had far better organisational skills, superior arms and a remarkable historic perspective. Equally important was the genius of the English to exploit to the hilt the personal ambitions, greed, intrigues, rivalries and animosities not only among the Maratha chieftains but also between different local rulers of the sub-continent. And thus with little difficulty the English succeeded by 1818 to depose the weakened Peshwa and unfurl the Union Jack over their palace in Pune, the *Shaniwar Wada*. The mighty Maratha rule vanished in thin air. By then Shivaji's ideal of "swarajya" had long been a history.

## RENAISSANCE AND THE SOCIAL REFORM MOVEMENT

Marathas were the last to go under the British dominion in the sub-continent. Their downfall was regretted by some as the 'sunset over Maharashtra/India'. Others like historian Jadunath Sarkar described it as the 'advent of the new era'. These two shades of opinion adequately reflected the prevailing sentiments in Maharashtra. The Peshwa regime had become unbearable for the commoners when it fell. They appreciated the enlightened approach of Mount Stuart Elphinstone, the Governor of the Deccan, to the administration. However, Maharashtra had tasted the nectar of freedom for over 150 years and many resented its loss. Some people, upset by the collapse of the Indian rulers saw a welcome opportunity of acquiring knowledge of sciences from the new rulers that made them so formidable and that may also help the Indian society to reform and come out of the rut it had fallen into.

The British rule was fundamentally different from what the Indians had experienced hitherto. Barring the religious practices, the company's administration touched almost all other aspects of the people's life. Revenue collection was direct, more comprehensive and oppressive than before. The hereditary positions and benefits of all classes were threatened as the British had their hand from policing to justice and made the people adhere to the rule of a written law, a new concept. Princely satraps, traders and

moneylenders as also more powerful *watandars* and *jahagirdars* were the principal allies of the company. Soon the peasants found the taxes increasingly unbearable. Britain was going through a great political upsurge and new humanitarian values of liberalism and democracy were taking shape. But not all company administrators were as liberal and enlightened as Elphinstone.

As the British settled down to rule the new territories, they faced sporadic uprisings of fiercely independent groups—the *adivasis*, *Mahadeo Kolis*, *Bhills*, *Ramoshis*... Umaji Naik, leader of the *Ramoshis*, challenged the British by releasing a manifesto appealing to the people to fight the English in every nook and corner. It took the British might 11 years to curb Umaji's rebellion. Umaji and his two associates were hanged in 1832. The rebellion of the hereditary keepers of forts in Kolhapur district was also ruthlessly put down in 1844. A few years later, another rebel, Vasudev Balwant Phadke, who organised the *Ramoshis* to challenge the British rule, was sentenced to life imprisonment and sent to Aden. Phadke, by his exploits, had aroused much popular interest even among the ruling classes. He is regarded in Maharashtra as the first armed revolutionary to challenge the British rule.

Even as these uprisings made the British more oppressive, there arose a class of Indians, which, having benefitted from English education was curious to know the secrets of the British power and the reasons of India's downfall. By enslaving this vast sub-continent, the British had triggered a dialectical process. On the one hand, they sapped India's economic strength thoroughly by efficiently exploiting and pauperising the people. On the other, by bringing in the new technologies and administrative methods, they functioned as a catalytic agent to release the hidden energies of the people and gave birth to a new middle class who would soon challenge their power.

### The Marathi Renaissance

Emergence of the middle class in India was a curious process which manifested all over India but particularly so in Bengal, the Bombay Presidency and the southern province of Madras. In Maharashtra, as elsewhere in India, class divisions hardly existed in classic sense before the advent of the British rulers. There were princely rulers, their wealthy satraps, sardars, feudal *watandars*, big landlords, the merchants and money-lenders. Rest of the people, including an overwhelming number of Brahmins, peasants and artisans, were simply poor. The classic middle class did not exist. The new middle class that emerged during early English period was not a self-employed class like the classical bourgeoisie in the French meaning. It consisted mainly of the higher castes, who had a tradition of learning and so were quick to grasp the importance of English education. They were the first to be recruited by the English to assist in administration.

It was mainly this class in the pay of the British establishment which constituted the Indian middle class. From this class emerged the intellectuals who would later challenge the British. This middle class gave rise to what some modern Maharashtrian intellectuals like to describe as the age of *probodhan* or renaissance. In this, Maharashtra followed in the footsteps of Bengal. Robert Clive's clever moves had ensured annexation of the entire Bengal province in 1757 and the company rule had nearly stabilised by the time the Union Jack was raised at Pune's *Shaniwarwada* in 1818. In Nagpur, Raghoji Bhosale's territories were annexed 35 years later. Thus the impact of the British rule, their new system of capitalist bourgeois economy was first felt in Bengal and produced an awakening known usually as the Bengal renaissance.

For about a hundred years, Bengal's conscious awareness of the changing modern world was more

developed than and ahead of the other regions in the sub-continent. Maharashtra was not far behind. Beginning of Bengal renaissance is considered to be the year 1815 when Raja Rammohan Roy plunged into social activities. Maharashtra's awakening could be said to have followed 17 years later. Balshastri Jambhekar, by publishing the first journal in Marathi-English in 1832 in Mumbai, heralded a new age of the spirit of enquiry in Maharashtra.

The phenomenon of renaissance in Maharashtra was in many ways different from what occurred in Europe of 17th and 18th century. The Bengal awakening too lacked the massive sweep and explosion of material and intellectual energy in the multi-dimensional upsurge that characterised the European renaissance. For one, India was a defeated country in the grip of an alien ruler. In Maharashtra, the memories of freedom during the Maratha rule were too fresh in the minds of this class to be easily forgotten. The Brahmins of Pune, the capital of Peshwas, were particularly bitter and restless. So were the other castes though their passions may not have been as intense.

Whether in Bengal or in Maharashtra, the new fountain of awakening did not spring originally from this soil and re-discovery of the old culture. It drew heavily from the alien conquerors' culture and knowledge. Thus, on the whole, a powerful wave of social self-introspection, self-criticism and examination swept through the western educated elites who began challenging the traditional hierarchies and authorities, questioning the scriptures and the prevailing value system and wondering about the cold, uninspiring attitude of the society towards acquisition of true knowledge. They believed, knowledge and new science as also reformed social systems would help enhance the quality of life of the general masses.

Paradoxically, this was also accompanied by a resurgence of pride in India's history, culture and religion.

The memories of Shivaji and his *swarajya* were revived. As described earlier, Shivaji's call for *Maharashtra Dharma* was not a restrictive appeal to parochial or sectarian sentiments. *Dharma* did not mean religion in its European meaning. The call was an attempt to define a distinctive identity of a people and their culture. Some historians see in it the faint awakening of the spirit of nationalism. Soon, the intellectuals and political leaders like Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak found in Shivaji a useful icon to awaken the people and infuse in them the spirit of nationalism and patriotism.

### Indian Perspective

It must be emphasised at this juncture that the 19th century thinkers and intellectuals of Maharashtra had not restricted their area of introspection to the Marathi speaking region of Maharashtra alone. In fact, the concept of a modern linguistic state of Maharashtra where all the Marathi speaking regions are brought under one administrative dispensation was not even imagined by the people at that time. The Marathi regions were spread out in different administrative presidencies. This new class of intellectuals had a broader perspective, its concern encompassing the whole sub-continent—an entity politically brought together by the British rule. Difficulties in communication did limit their physical movements. That did not deter them from considering the sub-continental India as their homeland and Maharashtra art of this entity.

Tilak, who later so daringly popularised Shivaji's term *swarajya*, instinctively understood that when Shivaji referred to *Hindavi swarajya* it was not a sectarian exclusive usage. *Hind* was a word in popular usage in Urdu denoting the entire Indian sub-continent. This is evident in the *bakhars* written by the chroniclers of the Mogul courts as well as those penned by the Deccan courtiers. Historians are amazed at the fact that the nationalistic sentiments of the early

intellectuals of Maharashtra, though abstract and amorphous, encompassed the whole of India under the British rule.

True, only a handful of the English officers coming to India for the company's service carried with them liberal, humanitarian and progressive thought generated in Britain during the Cromwellian era of democratic revolution. Mount Stuart Elphinstone, governor of the Deccan during this crucial period, must be counted among those few. British officers and teachers of this kind made a great impact on the eager minds of the young, western educated Maharashtrians awakening in them the spirit of enquiry. Some common characteristics of the new elite must be mentioned. First, they were keenly conscious of the stagnant, degraded and corrupt state into which the Indian society had fallen. They had a deep love for the people and the country and they wanted an all-round regeneration of the society. Second, they had the critical appreciation of the values of modern western culture and the ancient Indian wisdom alike.

The urge for social regeneration emboldened them to critically examine their social system, question their own value system and put to closer scrutiny their religious beliefs. The few progressive measures taken by officers like Bentinck, Dalhousie, Elphinstone, such as abolition of 'sati' tradition, abolition of slavery, liberal educational policies and freedom of press impressed them greatly. Others were moved and awed by the books they read. On the other hand, not all Christian missionaries were out to convert all and sundry they found on the nearest street. Many among them were genuinely committed to the Christ's ethos of service of the poor. The American Mission, the Scottish Mission, London Missionary Society were active in Maharashtra at that time. The spirit of selfless service and piety of the protestant priests won admiration from many sensitive Marathi souls.

### To the Good People of America

Jatirao Phule, a social rebel and revolutionary of outstanding character, was one such soul who drew inspiration from the spirit of selfless dedication of the Christian missionaries. He was also greatly impressed by the spiritual writings of Thomas Paine, by the French Revolution and the American war of Independence. American declaration of Independence was his great source of inspiration. He dedicated his book on slavery, *Gulamgiri*, to the "good people of the United States who showed generosity, selflessness and piety in liberating the slaves from bondage". Another sensitive soul, a Brahmin poet of great reputation, Narayana Waman Tilak, converted to Christianity causing turmoil among Pune Brahmins. Already, proselytising activities of many Christian missionaries had caused bitter resentment among the masses.

Thus, in the early 19th century, diverse forces were working in Maharashtra to encourage a spirit of introspection among the newly educated. There were two ways in which the new Marathi elite reacted to this turbulence. One section, awed by the achievements of the new rulers and their overall superiority, came to believe that the English rule was largely benevolent and a blessing in disguise under which the Indians could learn from the Western culture to reform and restructure their society on the English model. Some among them were of the view that whatever is good in the Western civilization should be accepted and blended with the Indian milieu. The rest should be discarded. They had already accepted the Western values of individual freedom and a sense of human dignity. The social reformers should evolve a system based on reason and justice, they felt.

Another section, refusing to discard its orthodoxy, believed in the glory of ancient Indian civilization and engaged itself in heated debates with Christian missionaries

who tried to run down the Hindu religious beliefs. Even so, this section too was in favour of a change, not so much in the religious domain as in the field of material development. Later in the last decades of the 19th century, when the ideas of social reform had begun to crystallise, Justice M.G. Ranade, a social reformer and economist who is considered among the builders of modern India, put the idea of change more succinctly. "The change which we should all seek is thus a change from constraint to freedom, from credulity to faith, from status to contract, from authority to reason, from unorganised to organised life, from bigotry to toleration, from blind fatalism to a sense of human dignity."

The *prabodhan* era thus produced a great intellectual ferment in Maharashtra triggering fierce debates on social, political and economic conditions of the country, as also on religious and social values. The rapid strides the East India Company took to consolidate its rule lent, as it were, a tinge or urgency to these debates. The English made thorough surveys of the countryside, discovered and began exploiting the mineral wealth. New machines driven by the force of steam came into use in Mumbai.

### New Education

Elphinstone, the enlightened Governor of the Deccan, was a liberal idealist. Within three years of the downfall of the Peshwas, Elphinstone opened in 1821 the 'Poona Sanskrit College' in Pune which later became famous as the Deccan College. He encouraged the establishment of the 'Bombay Native Education Society' in 1822 which later set up the Elphinstone College of Bombay in his memory. Endowments were given to Sanskrit scholars and Marathi writers to write books on useful subjects and translate works from English into Marathi. The Grant Medical College, the first institution rendering medical education, opened in Mumbai in 1845. It also had a section teaching engineering.



Elphinstone thus had laid the foundation of the education system in Bombay Presidency and India. In the meantime, the government had introduced major policy changes mainly in response to the awakening of the public opinion. In 1835, the long controversy over the educational policy to be adopted in colonial India was put to an end. Lord Macaulay's famous note on education was adopted by Governor Bentinck. The Indian people, it was decided, would be given western education through English medium. This policy had far reaching consequences for India.

### Communication

The Post and Telegraph system was put in place by 1848, a virtual communication revolution for those days when it was next to impossible for a common man to communicate with kith and kin living not very far away. A uniform currency based on the Indian rupee was introduced. Courts were established and justice rendered through the rule of law. By 1852, the people of Bombay saw the first steam locomotive pulling several carriages on the steel rails from 'Byculla' to 'Thana'. Soon, Pune, Sholapur, Nasik, Nagpur were linked to Bombay with the railroads. Jagannath Shankarsheth, an enlightened wealthy aristocrat of Bombay, took great initiative in ushering in the age of railways in India.

In fact, the first office of the Great Peninsular Railway company was opened at Shankarsheth's residence. Between 1830 and 1840, Shankarsheth's initiative was also helpful in establishing the Bombay branch of The Royal Asiatic Society and later another institution also dedicated to spread of knowledge, *Dnyan Prasarak Sabha*. He had his hand in setting up a secret body wedded to eradication of the evil of caste system, the *Paramhans Mandali*. In 1857, the first universities were opened in Mumbai, Madras and in Calcutta. There was a boom in trade and commerce in Bombay.

The pace of developments was so rapid and changes so far reaching that the new intellectuals of Maharashtra, like Raja Ram Mohan Roy of Bengal, soon realised that unless the social ills and inequities that afflicted Maharashtra and India were removed, religious practices reformed and people given modern education, Indian society had no future. It will continue to languish in the ignominy of slavery. This thinking gave rise to a powerful social reform movement in Maharashtra. A galaxy of social reformers during the early English period laid down the agenda of social reforms and education. Notable among the early reformers were Balkrishna Jambhekar, Lokahitawadi Deshmukh, Mahatma Jotiba Phule, Justice M.G. Ranade and G.G. Agarkar. Shahu Maharaj, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Bhaurao Patil and Vitthal Ramji Shinde were the standard bearers of reform in the early 20th century.

### A Galaxy of Reformers

Mention must be made of Gadge Maharaj who was consecrated a 'saint' by the people. He had millions of admirers and his discourses were attended by hundreds of thousands both in rural and urban areas. He ruthlessly attacked blind superstition, senseless religious rituals, social inequalities sanctioned by the religion, the caste system and lack of cleanliness and discipline in personal and social life. One cannot ignore Gadge's contribution because unlike the saints of the previous centuries whose concepts of equality and universal brotherhood were confined to spiritual domain, Gadge was a teacher of the masses, a hard task master who insisted by laying an example himself to demonstrate that these ideals could easily be brought into practice. He died in 1956. Maharashtra is proud of this great phalanx of social reformers who have given a distinct character, liberal and tolerant, to the social life of the people.

Of the early reformers, Jambhekar, an erudite scholar

of merit greatly respected by the contemporary British as well as the local elites for his fine intellectual prowess and his social commitments, is also considered the father of Marathi journalism who began publishing his Marathi-English journal *Darpan* from January 1832 in Mumbai. The objective was to make people wiser and aware of the world around, give them a glimpse of new sciences and technologies of Europe and infuse among them the urge to learn. Many contemporary reformers and intellectuals found journalism as an effective tool to educate the people and carry on the crucial debates publicly. A plethora of newspapers, journals and periodicals in Marathi soon began to be published from Bombay, Ahmednagar, Thane, Pune, Nagpur and so on.

Jambhekar's contemporary, Govind Vitthal alias Bhau Mahajan, launched his journal, *Prabhakar*, also from Mumbai, to 'acquaint the people with important political events in the world'. He analyzed the working of the English administration to pinpoint the blame of India's poverty on the British. He was fiercely proud of the Indian culture and hammered those who blindly imitated the British. He demanded representation to Indians in the British parliament, attacked the exploitative administrative practices of the government and pleaded for social and economic equality. But Lokahitavadi is more remembered for his ruthless criticism of India's social ills, caste discrimination and senseless religious rituals. Later, Lokmanya Tilak was to exploit the power of journalism to the hilt to awaken the political consciousness of the common people.

### In Search of Knowledge

The main objective of the *Dnyan Prasarak Sabha* of Mumbai was to spread knowledge by writing on scientific and practical subjects in the mother tongue in its pure form. Soon the city of Poona too had its own body of the same

name. 'Dnyan', knowledge was the key word with the young literate generation. The names of the new Marathi journals emphasised this obsession with acquisition of knowledge—*Dnyanoday*, *Dnyanprakash*, *Dnyandarpan* and *Dnyandarshan*, etc.

Drawing substantially from the English books, young people wrote with zeal in Marathi acquainting the readers with the new sciences—physics, chemistry, zoology, botany, geology, geography, biology, economics, history, astronomy. Dadabhai Nauroji and Jagannath Shankarsheth were among the chief promoters of *Dnyan Prasarak Sabha*. Dadoba Pabdurang Tarkhadkar was its first president. The debates on crucial issues conducted by the Sabha inspired many young people to dedicate their energies for the service of the people and the country. M.G. Ranade was among such youths.

In Bombay, a new body came into being in March 1867, *Prarthana Samaj*, dedicated to religious reforms. The earlier attempts in this direction through the *Paramhans Sabha*, a cosmopolitan venture true to Bombay's character, had failed. Most of the people associated with the *Paramhans sabha*, chiefly Tarkhadkar brothers, took lead in establishing this new Samaj whose objective was to simplify the tenets of Hindu religion, make it more unitary and humanitarian and completely do away with the caste system. In a way, the *Prarthana Samaj* sought to find a middle ground between the two extreme thoughts, one almost rejecting the entire Hindu heritage short of embracing Christianity and the other stubbornly clinging to the ancient heritage, its norms, traditions and rituals.

The *samaj* propounded the concept of one formless God, omniscient, omnipotent, encompassing and controlling the entire universe. Peace lay in praying to this God, it believed. In the end, the ideas of the *Samaj* proved to be too esoteric and rather opposed to the celebration of plurality, so much

an integral part of Indian thinking. The *Prarthana Samaj* did survive for a long time but unlike the *Arya Samaj* of the north and *Brahmo Samaj* of Bengal, could attract following only from among the western educated elite of Bombay. The masses kept away from it. However, in the meantime, it did inspire great souls like Justice Ranade and R.G. Bhandarkar.

### The Great Debate

The emphasis of the western educated youths of the early British period, who wanted to do something for the society, was naturally on social reform rather than on political reform. The contrast between the European culture and values on the one hand—as they perceived through reading of English books and through interaction with enlightened English officers and missionaries—and the state of Indian culture and society on the other at that time was so glaring that their priorities were decided by the prevailing reality as it were. Later, there developed a schism on the question of priorities. The school of thought represented by Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Gopal Ganesh Agarkar believed that to make Indians capable of self rule, social and religious reforms through education must be undertaken with priority.

On the other hand the school represented by Tilak was of the firm view that political independence must be achieved first. Social and religious reforms would follow later and it would be easier to carry them out under self rule rather than under the bondage of the aliens. Tilak was convinced that insistence on social and religious reforms at that juncture might divide the society and create obstacles in the struggle for political independence. His focus was on speedy political reforms. It was because of this passionate pursuit of the goal of political liberation that Tilak on many occasions vehemently opposed sensible social reforms although he acknowledged that such reforms were essential for the material and moral upliftment of the Indian society.

Reforms would come in due course and should not be pursued in haste, he felt.

Echoes of this great debate between the two titans, Tilak and Agarkar, still reverberate in Maharashtra and are broadly heard, although in a different tune and pitch, in the present ideological divide in the academic, intellectual and political spheres. We shall briefly relate the lives and contribution of prominent social reformers along with those of the makers of modern Maharashtra in a separate chapter. However, reference must be made here of the conflicts between the social reformers and the traditional orthodoxy as also certain shortcomings of the social reform movement in the early decade of the 19th century. Most of the early social reformers were Brahmins, a natural consequence of historic social reality. They were the first to acquire English education, being the traditional keepers of knowledge and learning of which they had unquestioned monopoly.

### Grip of the Orthodoxy

Though one cannot question the integrity and intellectual honesty of the Brahmin social reformers, the fact is that they were more focused on the issues concerning their caste such as child marriage, inhuman treatment meted out to the Brahmin widows, widow remarriage, senseless rituals that tied a Brahmin to his family and so on. Not that they were unaware of the larger basic maladies that afflicted the Hindu society like the caste system and untouchability. Many made scathing attacks in their writings on the caste system, on the perversities of untouchability and on the hegemony of Brahmins. They vehemently criticised the current perversions of the ancient Hindu religion. But few of them had the courage and guts to raise a public campaign and actively fight the system.

As historian and veteran observer of the 19th century Maharashtra, Dr. Y.D. Phadke observes, barring Phule, social

reformers of Maharashtra in the nineteenth century concentrated their attention more on the need to improve the lot of women than on the campaign against the inequities of the caste system. "But for the valiant efforts made by Jotiarao to campaign against the practice of untouchability, the problems of the untouchables seemed to have been given a low priority," observes Dr. Phadke. Many of the reforms advocated by the Brahmin reformers with great gusto were thus relevant to the upper castes alone and meaningful only to those who belonged to these castes. Even so the reformers' offensive, howsoever moderate, met stubborn orthodox resistance. The shocked conservative sentiment was roused to anger by the reformers' encroachment upon the cherished customs of the ancient society.

Such was the power and grip of the Brahmin orthodoxy, particularly in Pune, that many Brahmins who advocated minor reforms like widow re-marriage had to face the wrath of the priests. Some who practiced what they preached had to suffer social ostracism, the dreaded ultimate weapon in the caste system as all Indians know. The social and religious boycott was not confined to an 'erring' individual. His whole extended family had to suffer the cruelty and indignity of social and religious boycott. Many veteran leaders of the social reform movement had to suffer ridicule and humiliation of their progressive colleagues for having buckled under the pressure of the orthodoxy at crucial movements when they could demonstrate by example. They were afraid not of their own sufferings. But they feared for their family, for their married and unmarried daughters, for their progeny.

That does not, however, diminish the significance of the contribution made by the social reformers of the 19th century to the social life of Maharashtra. Many continue to draw inspiration even today from the life and works of Phule, Ranade, Agarkar, Bhandarkar, Dhondo Keshav Karve

and such other reformers who have acquired legendary status in Maharashtra's history. Modern Maharashtra owes much of the socially progressive policies of the state and liberal political and social ambience to these leaders.

### Practical Reforms

Later with the advent of Tilak at the centre-stage of politics, the social reform movement did not attract as much attention of the Brahmin youths as before. There were individual crusaders who kept the flag of social reforms flying. But the focus of the public discourse was on political freedom. Social issues could wait till the attainment of freedom, Tilak believed. However, the spark that was ignited by the early reformers like Phule endured. Later in the 20th century, Shahu Maharaj and Dr. Ambedkar picked up the gauntlet and vehemently attacked the evils of caste system and untouchability.

These were action-oriented reformers whose efforts were responsible in loosening the grip of the caste system on the Hindu society to some extent. Dr. Ambedkar awakened the untouchables to their human rights and carried out a sustained agitation to earn for them social and political equality. Both Ambedkar and Shahu worked not only for eradicating the evil of untouchability but also for the larger goal of doing away with the pernicious caste system.

An unusual contribution of a maverick social reformer in a comparatively recent period needs mention. He was Raghunatha Dhondo Karve who set up the first birth control clinic of India in Mumbai in 1921. Son of the legendary Dhondo Keshav Karve of Pune who founded the first women's university in India, Raghunath undertook the cause of educating people in birth control by use of contraceptives as a means to ensure welfare of women and children. His endeavour shocked even the urban elites and

Karve had to suffer ridicule and insults. Karve continued undeterred. He is regarded a pioneer of this particular field in India. He dealt with the sexually transmitted diseases as well. Karve died unsung and unwept but the issue he pioneered is now the accepted policy of the Indian state.

### Political Voices

Coming back to early English period, awakening of political aspirations in modern sense was becoming faintly discernible in the city of Mumbai before mid-nineteenth century. Perhaps, closer intellectual interaction with the British, the growing influence of traders and entrepreneurs and comparatively relaxed cosmopolitan ambience of the urban life may have made it possible. The establishment of the 'Bombay Association' in May 1852, therefore, was an outcome not only of the intense intellectual discourse on the ills and shortcomings of the Indian society carried out at various levels in the Bombay Presidency. It also stemmed from the growing realisation by the elites of the basic exploitative nature of the British rule and injustices of the Company.

There was also the realisation that although on the face of it, the British rule looked comparatively benevolent, profit of the company and not welfare of the people was its main objective. The promoters of this association took clue from the British Indian Association, established in Calcutta in 1851 in which all groups joined in—radical, moderates and conservative. In Bombay, Shankarsheth and Nauroji took lead in setting up the Association.

The birth of the Bombay Association is regarded as the beginning of the political movement, a prelude to politicisation of dissent in its modern sense in India. Indeed, many observers believe that the activities of the Association, its representative character and its boldness in airing the grievances of the people—including, of course, those of the

traders, merchants and businessmen—finally culminated in the birth of the Indian National Congress in Mumbai 33 years later.

Although the Association's members were mostly the western educated elites, it truly represented the plural character of Bombay and India. Among its members were Hindus (both Maratha and Gujarati), Parsis, Jews, Christians and Muslims—truly a representative character, a 'hold-all' nature which the Congress Party was to adopt eventually. The Association believed in constitutional means in airing the grievances of the Indian people. Its first major achievement was to send a most comprehensive memorandum to parliament of England listing the complaints against the administration of the East India Company and seeking redressal of the injustices perpetrated on the people of India. And though the Association members belonged to the elite enamored by the superior culture of the British, it was not blind to the rising discontent and unrest among the common people and peasants.

This unrest was soon to culminate in 1857 in an armed rebellion against the alien rule which threw into turmoil the entire sub-continent. It was the first wide-spread armed uprising against the colonial rule in which the Indian soldiers of the English army had taken the initiative. The empire shook. The company ruthlessly put down the revolt with unusual vengeance and appalling bloodshed. The rebellion, described by Veer V.D. Savarkar, a super nationalist who believed in terrorism as a means to achieve liberation, as the 'first war of independence', was as much a turning point for the colonial rulers as for the Indians themselves.

7

## 1857 AND MAHARASHTRA

For many reasons, the 1857 uprising, which caused so much turmoil in India and in England when the British empire appeared to be tottering on the brink of a disaster, had little impact on Maharashtra. Most of the south India and Bengal too seemed to have kept aloof. There was unease in Maharashtra. Most British officers were nervous and extra vigilant. In Nagpur, Bhandara, Kolhapur, Satara and Khandesh, there were attempts to organise armed men to join the rebels in the north. But these efforts were nipped in the bud, thanks to the intelligence available to the British. So was a conspiracy of a local group to cause trouble in Bombay. But by and large, the cities of Mumbai and Pune as the rest of Maharashtra remained calm though uneasy throughout the turbulent year. Curiously enough, this happened despite the fact that many prominent leaders of the uprising were of Maratha origin—Tatya Tope, Nanasaheb, the adopted son of the last Peshwa banished far away, Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi, the Scindias of Gwalior.

The Bhosala principality of Nagpur was annexed by the British as recently as in 1853. The people were restless. Indian soldiers of the British army placed in and around Nagpur were planning to join the uprisings when they were betrayed. Several hundred men were arrested and two soldiers, Vilayat Ali and Kadir Khan, leaders of the group, were hanged without any trial. A nationalist landlord of Chandrapur district, Baburao Puleshwar Rajgond was also

hanged. Another landlord, Venkatrao Rajgond, was sentenced to life imprisonment.

The nearby Bhandara district went up in flames under the leadership of Chimanaji. The uprising was put down but it ignited a spark in the neighbouring Gondwana where the people were extremely unhappy with the British because of annexation of the entire adivasi principality of Gadhmahla by intrigues and cheating. Shankarshah of the deposed princely family of Gadhmahla, his son Raghunath Shah, and the leader of the Satpura revolt, Seetaram Shah, were in touch with Tatya Tope. Most adivasis of Gondwana were up in arms. Treachery did its trick and soon Shankarshah was arrested and blown up into pieces by tying him to the mouth of a field gun.

### Rango Bapuji

Rango Bapuji, was the advisor to Chhatrapati Pratapsinh, who was on the Maratha throne of Satara. When Pratapsinh was deposed unjustly by the British, Rango Bapuji went to England to plead his case. He stayed there for 13 years, knocking on the doors of the courts, Parliament, influential political leaders. He also addressed public meetings to explain the case of Pratapsinh. To no avail. Rango Bapuji returned home in 1853 a frustrated man seething with anger against the monumental injustice of the British system. He began organising a network among the Mawala and Ramoshi recruits of the British army in the neighbouring units. He secretly travelled to North India, held confabulations with Tatya Tope and other leaders of the insurgency.

But the British intelligence had been keeping an eye on his activities since his days in England. When the unrest erupted into violence in the north, Rango Bapuji was supposed to open a front in the south. Unfortunately, the treacherous eyes of the British spies betrayed him. Most of

these spies in India were obviously Indians. British busted the whole network and arrested several people. Many were hanged, others blown by guns, a favourite method of the British. "It has an excellent demonstrative effect putting terror in the hearts of the native. Besides, it caused no pain to the culprit", recorded a humanitarian British officer for the posterity.

In Kolhapur, the seat of the other Maratha throne, the king's brother Chimasaheb was in secret communication with Nanasaheb Peshwa and the mutinous army units of Gwalior. Chimasaheb had his network spread deep into South Maharashtra and parts of Karnataka. However, the Chhatrapati himself was pro-British. About a hundred conspirators fell in the hands of the British. Over 50 of them were killed without any trial by the panicky British officers.

In Marathwada areas too, nearly a hundred insurgents were killed mercilessly. "Some were hanged, some were put to the bullet and one was blown up by a gun. Four mutineers were literally cut to pieces and nearly sixty were lashed till they died". Such was the cruelty of the nervous British officers panicked by the news of the holocaust in the north. Karjasingh and Bhima Naik, leaders of the Bhills in Khandesh, had raised an army of about 1500 armed Bhills who constantly harassed the British patrols by using guerilla tactics. A large number of them were women. As it happened, the British soon caught nearly 60 of them. It need not be said that most of them were killed immediately without trial.

### **Bombay\* Whisperings**

British never expected any trouble in Bombay. It was a wealthy cosmopolitan city of merchants, traders and entrepreneurs as also the western educated elites. The British

officers had close relations with them. However, the news from the north had made the British restless. Particularly after the insurgents captured Delhi and declared the heir to the Mogul throne, Bahadurshah Jafar, as their King emperor, the British feared that the Muslims of Bombay might play a mischief. Bombay was an important city, the first port of call in India after a tedious journey round the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa. The Suez canal was to open 12 years later in 1869. The British were determined to keep it free of any rebellious tendencies.

The police chief kept a stringent vigil and spread a thick network of his spies all over. Forget, a legendary officer, was himself adept at changing his appearance to take nightly rounds of the city. Spies soon found out that a group of Indian soldiers clandestinely held nightly meetings in the city at the residence of one Gangaprasad. The conspirators, it was discovered, had decided to rise in arms on the first Diwali day and sack the city. The whole group was arrested before the plan was put to action. Two army men were publicly blown up by a gun at the Esplanade and Gangaprasad with seven others was sentenced to life.

Wall posters appeared in Pune declaring that Nanasaheb Peshwa would soon return to the city, kill all the Europeans and re-establish the Peshwa rule. Nanasaheb was undoubtedly one of the most prominent leaders of the 1857 uprising. The orthodox Poona Brahmins, in whose minds the memories of the Peshwa rule were fresh, had great expectations from Nanasaheb. But he never turned up in Pune. Instead, he escaped to Nepal. The British increased the award on his head from Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 1 lakh.

Rani Laxmibai escaped from her besieged fort of Jhansi on a horseback with her adopted son tied to her back. Soon the pursuing British army units caught up with her and she was killed in the ensuing battle. Tatyia Tope who

\* Now rechristened Mumbai.



was moving from place to place with lightening speed in the north India to coordinate the insurgency, was determined to cross the Narmada river and enter Maharashtra. There, he hoped, he could garner massive support to turn the tide against the English. He did cross the Narmada but was arrested soon after. Tatyasaheb was hanged to death in April 1859. The insurgency had finally come to an end.

### **The Lukewarm Response**

All said and done, the response of Maharashtra to the northern uprising was less than zestful. As we have seen, there were some sporadic, fitful attempts by small groups, without proper planning or coordination. But these were effectively put down by the British. Bombay, Pune and most of the Deccan remained largely trouble free. A high state of alert of the panicky but angry English establishment, meticulous planning, effective intelligence network and ruthlessness in dealing with suspects was in no small measure responsible for this lukewarm response to the revolt described later by a respected son of Maharashtra, Savarkar, as India's first war of independence. But there are many other factors equally to be weighed while considering Maharashtra's failure to respond. This is no place to recount the whole story, even if briefly, of the 1857 episode in relation to Maharashtra. But a brief scrutiny of the reasons that ignited the spark of rebellion and of the factors that led to its failure may help us to understand the reasons behind Maharashtra's peculiar response.

First, the positive aspects of the insurgency which moved Savarkar to elevate it to a glorious freedom struggle. It was undoubtedly the first armed insurgency, particularly of the trained Indian troops in the British army on such a large scale as to threaten the very presence of the British in India. Barring Punjab, it swept most of the north India, at places awakening a nationalist feeling among the people.

The discontented princes and feudatories poured oil in the fire and conflagration rapidly spread.

### **Those Satanic Cartridges**

The uprising was also a great demonstration of Hindu-Muslim unity, a certain indication of their realisation that their destinies were unalterably linked. Many historians have remarked on this fact. Even Savarkar, the father of the Hindu Sabha, acknowledges this phenomenon albeit without specifically mentioning it. Though the major brains behind the upheaval turned out to be Hindus, they had no hesitation in declaring a Mogul heir as the new emperor of Delhi. Even the British officers in their correspondence have regretted their failure to drive a schism between the Hindus and the Muslims. A contemporary British officer, Sir Charles Aitchison, candidly but regretfully writes later, "In this instance, we could not play off the Muhamadan against the Hindu. Those fatal cartridges seemed to have been compounded with a satanic ingenuity to provide a common ground..." The British had learnt a lesson and would follow it up with extra-ordinary vehemence for the next 90 years.

The British had first arrived in India in August 1608 when a ship belonging to the East India Company carrying merchandise, anchored at Surat. The Mogul empire under emperor Shahjahan was at the zenith of its glory, being the mightiest and the wealthiest empire in the world. At that time, Britain was a small island nation struggling with other European powers to discover new sea routes and find new markets for commerce. By sheer tenacity, diligence better organisational acumen, superior arms, a broader perspective and diplomatic skills backed by the might of the sea-faring empire—which it had become by that time—and the new capitalist economy fueled by technological innovations, Britain had emerged as a major player in the chaotic situation in the sub-continent by the middle of the 18th century.

The crucial victory of Robert Clive in 1757 at Plassey made the British realise that the Indian apple was ripe enough to fall in their empire's basket. They had gone from strength to strength. By 1857, British had almost the unchallenged supremacy of the seven seas. It was, as historians observe, regarded as the biggest and the mightiest empire in the human history till then. The British East India Company had established its supremacy in the Indian sub-continent and had, by proxy, laid the Indian jewel in the crown of the British empire as it were.

A hundred years had passed after the battle of Plassey when the insurgency occurred. It was not a big surprise for the British, though. For many months, the officers found a strange restlessness and a silent anger seething among the troops. The new Enfield rifles required new cartridges. Rumors sweeping the troops had it that the cartridges came in coverings smeared both with the fat of the cow and the pig. Moreover, the soldiers were required to tear this covering with teeth to load the cartridges in the rifle. For both Hindu and Muslim soldiers it was the worst kind of sacrilege.

### **British Racial Contempt**

Some of the British officers were aware of the danger lurking. After the first incident when a soldier Mangal Pandey at the Barrackpore unit, enraged by the demonic offence, killed several white officers, the British hanged him to make an example, the usual practice to enforce discipline among the Indian troops. But this time, it did not work. The incendiary rumors continued, more and more troops began defying the white officers. There were explosions of anger at other army camps. In Meerut, soldiers revolted, killed all the whites in the vicinity and rushed to Delhi.

It was then that the magnitude and seriousness of the affair dawned on the British. It was a great blow to the British

empirical pride. For loss of Delhi meant, in the eyes of the people and the troops as also many old Indians among the white officers, loss of India. This would surely have disastrous economic implications for Britain. It would also lose its world-wide status. The armed rebellion of the Indian troops, aided by the discontented princes, struck terror in their hearts. That was a great achievement on the part of the insurgents. Savarkar extolled the glory of the insurgency mostly on these lines. It must also be noted that during the insurgency, some of the hidden instincts of the British—their cruelty and the thirst for blood when stung and their racial contempt for the Indians—came to surface with appalling ferocity.

On the other hand, an objective scrutiny shows that the peasants who were crushed under the burden of the increasing agricultural tax were nowhere in the picture. It could be said that the British Army's ordinary Indian soldiers, who came mostly from the peasant stock, were amply aware of the rural injustices and this may have fueled their anger. However, this grievance was nowhere on the agenda of the rebels. The seething discontent of the soldiers was converted into violent anger when their superstitious beliefs were threatened—the fat of pork and beef on the leather covering of the bullets. Another crucial issue which caused tremendous resentment and anger against the Company was the Company's policy during the previous hundred years to annex as many princely states to their empire as possible under any pretext. Mental health of the ruler, 'illegality' of succession, adoption of a son where there was no natural heir, financial indiscipline, breach of British law—anything and everything was used cleverly to depose the ruler and annex the territory.

This had caused great unrest among the ruling houses throughout the sub-continent. Their satraps, sardars, nawabs, jahagirdars and the feudal landlords, all found the British

encroachment on their hereditary rights nefarious and unjust. The insurgency was not the culmination of the concept of nationalism which sought to overthrow an alien rule. It was driven principally by the selfish motives of the feudal rulers. Even the British have recorded that there was no proof of a pre-conceived general conspiracy for overthrowing of the English rule. No evidence was found even in the records of the Delhi palace that the Mogul King dreamt of restoring his empire.

### Spineless Satraps

The British, in the subsequent investigations have meticulously and objectively recorded that there may have been many grievances of the people and the common peasantry against the company administration. Even anger, they acknowledged. But the common people never initiated trouble. And at whichever places people took to arms and participated in the subsequent looting, they followed troops. Not all the native princes joined the fray. Only a few of the extremely disgruntled ones threw all caution to winds to desperately join the upheaval among the troops.

Most of the feudatories were spineless satraps wallowing in the few privileges accorded to them by their British masters. It was only when the troops captured Delhi that their confidence began wavering. But, as records show, when they saw the tide turning, they fell over each other to respond to the call of their masters to assist by sending troops and money to quell the insurgency. The British had a scientific mind, a global perspective and a modern disciplined army on their side. In the two hundred years of acquaintance, they knew their India well. The Indian feudal princes of that time were not only an illiterate and ignoramus lot, they lacked even the sub-continental perspective. By 1857, two generations of Bengal, Maharashtra and the South have had

the privilege of Western education. They knew the difference.

However, it must also be strongly emphasised that as the bulldozer of the insurgency rolled through the north India and Delhi crushing the British cantonments in its path, a new mood took over even if for a short while. The stirring call of "Chalo Dilli" awakened in the Indian breasts the nationalistic pride for the iconic city of Delhi. From ancient times, through the centuries in the hoary past, much before the advent of the Turks, the Persians and the Moguls, Delhi had remained the seat of power in the Indian consciousness.

### Stirring Call

The call had in it the seeds of nationalism and also of Hindu-Muslim unity. Some of the feudatories may have also been stirred with this call nursing fond hopes of reviving the past. They knew, as the common people, feudal lords and peasantry had realised, that these alien rulers were different from previous ones. They were interfering with every aspect of their life. If the Indian soldiers, an instrument created by the British threw their masters out of the country, few of them would regret. Such was the power of the call that it resounded through the sub-continent. Eighty-five years later, Subhash Chandra Bose put to use that same call—*Chalo Dillee*—with great verve.

The western educated elites of Calcutta, Mumbai and Madras were far better placed to understand the matrix of the turbulence. They had the better appreciation of the might of the British and many of them might have concluded in their hearts that it was unlikely that the unorganised, ill-equipped rebels with confused objectives had any chance before the organised might of the British empire. The upheaval was a mixed character. Many historians note that barring the principality of Oudh where the uprising had some popular support, almost everywhere else, the leaders of the upsurge neither had the character nor the potential to

attract the western educated elites of Bengal or Maharashtra. Many of them did not want the British to be driven out. The first spark of the revolt fell in the Bengal Army units stationed at Barrackpore in Bengal. It did not find echo in the mind of the educated Bengal.

Similarly, the leadership of Tatyasaheb or Rani Laxmibai—all Marathas—failed to evoke any affinity or substantial response in the hearts of the educated scholars of cosmopolitan Bombay or elsewhere in Maharashtra. This did not mean the elites were completely enamored with the British rule. On the contrary, they were already voicing criticism of the Company administration and expressing the aspirations of the Indian people in the newspapers and the journals. Some of the journals during the upheaval were bold enough to resist the panicky English clamour for vengeance. In Pune, Jotirao Phule, the relentless fighter against the Brahmin domination of the Hindu society and no less a harsh critic of the British administration had, nevertheless, openly declared preference for the British rule against the revival of the Peshwa rule which some of the orthodox Brahmins were fondly hoping.

In Bombay, the leader of the Indian community was Nana Shankarseth, the enlightened merchant who took great interest in promoting western education among the natives. He was instrumental in establishing the Bombay Association and was made its president. Some British officers conspired to implicate him in the insurgency by forging *hundi* papers. Nana came out of it completely clean. Nana's main thrust of social activities was education. He was undoubtedly a patriot. But he had a modern mind and he would be the last person to say that an armed insurgency at that point of time against the British was desirable or had any chance of success.

#### **Elphinstone's Vision**

Balshastri Jambhekar, Gopal Hari Deshmukh and their

younger contemporaries had believed that the English rule was benevolent one, albeit with many shortcomings. Indians could improve their lot by learning many things from the English. Nana had close relations with the first Governor of the Deccan, Mountstuart Elphinstone till the latter retired. Elphinstone's sincere commitment to the education of the natives, his benevolence and culture had greatly influenced Nana and his contemporary educated Indians.

Many a British officer, in 1857, must have remembered a prediction made by Elphinstone when he took over the Governorship of the Deccan in 1819. This is what he wrote to his superior in a memorandum. "I am afraid the belief that our Indian Empire will not be long lived is reason and not prejudice. It is difficult to guess how it may die; but if it escapes the Russian and other foreign attacks, I think the seeds of its ruin will be found in the native army—a delicate and dangerous machine, which a little mismanagement may easily turn against us. The most desirable death for us to die of should be the improvement of the natives reaching such a pitch as would render it impossible for a foreign nation to retain the Government; but this seems at an immeasurable distance... a time of separation must come".

One is awed by the insight and the vision of Elphinstone under whose benign eye many of Maharashtra's intelligent youths, who were to turn out later as patriots and leaders of people, were taking the lessons in rationalism, history, humanitarianism and liberalism. They were unlikely to go in an emotional tizzy provoked by upheaval in the North. Though, a century later, the 1857 episode would provide to their heirs an emotional anchor on which to build a new nationalistic history.

#### **End of the Company Raj**

Elphinstone wrote in 1819 about the time of separation which would inevitably come. In 1857, that time had not come

But it was certainly time for the British East India Company to bow out. It had underestimated the religious sentiments of the Indian soldiers, a 'mismanagement' of the 'delicate and dangerous machine' of which Elphinstone spoke. The insurgency was decisively put down by the British within a year. That also spelt the end of the British East India Company's 258-year old administration in the sub-continent. Queen Victoria, declared as the Empress, took over as the ruler through the British parliament.

Many educated Indians welcomed this development. The queen released a manifesto enumerating the new policy of her government in regard to colonial India. All agreement made by the Company with the princely states would be followed by the word; the government would not interfere in the religious life of the people, land would be the hereditary property of the peasants, native entrepreneurship would be encouraged... The government would work for the welfare of the people...

The manifesto showered promises on the people. Many felt a new era had dawned. Others were skeptical. Soon the hollowness of the promises made by the colonial empire started becoming apparent. The injustice of an alien rule and of the slavery had not ended. The intellectuals of Maharashtra were on the forefront in passionately articulating this restlessness. It was just a year before the insurgency, on April 1856, that Bal Gangadhar Tilak, later to be described by the British as the "father of the Indian unrest" was born in a small district town of Ratnagiri in coastal Maharashtra. Within a few decades he was to storm the Indian scene by making a demand for 'swaraj' and fomenting unrest among the youth fired with the new concept of Indian nationalism.

## 8

## INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

For Maharashtra, the period after 1857 till the emergence of Independent India can be divided in three phases. The first phase was of learning new sciences, continuation of local renaissance, scrutiny of the social ills and awakening of political consciousness of the people. The process discussed in some details in an earlier chapter, continued in the 20th century and as a matter of fact, it still goes on.

However, in the last two decades of the 19th century, we find a dramatic change in the mood of the people. The rise of Tilak generated a new spirit of nationalism among the people of Maharashtra and political issues became the central theme of concern. Tilak galvanised people for political cause and lent an aggressive edge to the Indian efforts to secure political rights under the colonial rule. No wonder, Tilak acquired a national stature and was considered the foremost leader of the radical group within the Indian National Congress which, until then, was happy with moderate, petitioner measures in articulating the grievances of the people.

Thus the second phase between 1880 and 1920—particularly between 1905 and 1920—till his death was dominated by Tilak. This was as much true of India as of Maharashtra. Tilak took politics from the drawing rooms of the Indian elites to the streets of bazar and clearly articulated the concept of self-rule of 'Swarajya' in unmistakable terms. He understood the necessity of large

scale mobilisation of the common people to achieve this goal and launched various movements to attract them. Mahatma Gandhi took over the same theme after Tilak's death and expanded it with astounding results.

### **The Golden Era**

The period mentioned above is regarded as the golden era of pre-independent Maharashtra when a galaxy of Maharashtrian leaders, thinkers and intellectuals made their presence felt on the Indian scene and contributed substantially to regeneration of India. After 1920, the strong Maharashtrian presence on the nascent Indian polity slowly faded although a remarkably large number of Marathi people actively participated in the freedom struggle under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Even after Independence, Maharashtra could never acquire the intellectual stature that it had between 1880 and 1920.

The third phase was when Mahatma Gandhi stormed the Indian sub-continent and more or less the whole of Maharashtra was emotionally swept and involved in this new hurricane brought as if by magic by the Mahatma. In that respect, as indicated above, many historians consider the Mahatma's emergence as continuation of Tilak's political line in as much as its radical content and strategic efforts to get the masses involved in the national struggle. Indeed, Tilak's frequent suggestions of using boycott of foreign goods and of the British administration as a weapon of the freedom struggle underscores this interpretation.

No wonder many of the stalwarts among the hard-core Tilakite radicals such as P.M. Bapat (a believer of armed revolution earlier), Achyutrao Kolhatkar, Gangadhar Deshpande, N.V. Gadgil, S.M. Paranjpe, Vamanrao Joshi became committed Gandhians after Tilak. In fact, much of Maharashtra's peasantry, particularly the Marathas who were under the spell of the non-Brahmin movement of the

time, were wary of the Brahminic leadership during the Tilak era. It was Gandhi's appeal that attracted the peasantry in large numbers to the movement. The history of India's freedom struggle under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership will not be complete without noting the substantial contribution made by the common people, the peasants of Maharashtra, a beehive of dedicated middle class workers and intellectuals of the caliber of Vinoba Bhave.

### **The Sub-continental Metamorphosis**

In the meantime, as the East India Company was sent in the margins and the Government of the Queen took over, Indian sub-continent was going through a metamorphosis, a social, economic, political and material change so dramatic and far reaching that it completely overwhelmed the people. For hundreds of generations the material environment and the life style of the people of India had scarcely seen any change. Now with the advent of the British, everything around had turned topsy turvy in the span of one generation. Much of the change was positive, though. Perhaps, with the exception of Calcutta, the change was more acutely manifest in Bombay, Pune and the surrounding areas of Western Maharashtra than anywhere else in India.

Historically, Calcutta was the headquarters of the Company and it had acquired a status of the British colony's capital. From Calcutta, smaller British ships could sail to the hinterland up to Patna using the Hooghly and Ganga waterways. However, as the natural safety of the Bombay harbour became apparent, the city became the first port of call for most ships coming from Europe. By mid 19th century, the slow-moving ancient ships gave way to faster steam ships. With the Suez canal opening in 1869, the travelling time between London and Bombay got reduced to within twenty days. The railway network with Bombay port as the hub, soon made the city commercially

the most important one in the sub-continent.

These developments proved critical in the increasing importance of Bombay and its interior, Pune and Western Maharashtra. Indeed, when the East India Company's first ship anchored in the port of Surat in August 1608, that was the first small step in the direction of globalisation of the Indian market. Introduction of steam ships and opening of the Suez Canal brought the Indian market closer to Europe and Bombay. Though the laying of railroads was commenced during the company's rule and the first train between Byculla and Thane ran in 1852, its network was rapidly expanded by the Queen's government. Very soon, Pune, Nasik, Nagpur, Sholapur, the major cities of the Marathi speaking areas surrounded by vast tracts of fertile agricultural land were connected to Bombay. Of course, the railroad expansion was executed by the Government not necessarily for the convenience of the people but for the rapid movement of raw materials such as cotton to the port of Bombay and of the troops to the interior.

### **Sub-continental Bonds**

Establishment of post and telegraph systems had ushered in a communication revolution. This not only facilitated the Government administration and trade but also helped the native intellectuals in building their own communication network. It brought the Marathi speaking people of Vidarbha and Western Maharashtra, North and South Maharashtra closer culturally and emotionally. Tilak's influence and message could spread to all corners of Maharashtra easily. With the extension of the rail network across the country, interaction between the native intellectuals and national leaders from Maharashtra, Bengal, Madras, Punjab and North India was also facilitated. The cultural, sentimental and nationalistic bonds between different parts of the sub-continent became stronger.

The customs duty on imports imposed by the East India Company was substantially reduced by the new Government in 1860. This had a salient impact on the increased trading activities of the Indians. Indian entrepreneurs also began entering the manufacturing activity and set up their own industries. There was a global dimension to this development. The civil war in the North America during this period had made an adverse impact on the British economy. Import of cotton from America had drastically shrunk. Agents of textile manufacturers in England encouraged the peasants of Khandesh, Berar and Sholapur to sow more cotton. Gradually, local entrepreneurs also began setting up their own ginning and pressing mills in these areas. Huge quantities of ginned and pressed cotton rather than raw cotton could be more conveniently transported by rail to Bombay and thence to Manchester.

The peasants of Vidarbha, Khandesh and the Deccan were thus drawn in the global market, as it were, and experienced a marginal improvement in their conditions. The beneficiaries were the middlemen and the big landlords who made huge profits. The real big bonanza was for the traders and agents who made astounding profits on these deals. By the end of the 19th century, they had set up their own textile mills in Bombay, Nagpur, Sholapur, Amaravati and in Surat and Ahmedabad in neighbouring Gujarat which was then a part of the Bombay Presidency.

### **Winds of Change**

One can imagine the stupendous changes the city of Bombay underwent within just three to four decades of the 19th century. The railroad traffic between Bombay and Thane opened in 1853. In a short span between 1851 and 1885, as many as 73 textile mills were set up in the city changing the life styles of thousands of people dramatically. As workers, traders and entrepreneurs poured into the city from all



corners of the sub-continent, its population ballooned. While the bulk of the textile workers was of the Marathi stock, others coming from Andhra, Karnataka, Gujarat and the distant North joined the growing working population. The wealthy Parsi and Gujarati merchants were prominent among the entrepreneurs who set up the new mills. Ancillary industries mushroomed. With the advent of automobiles and coming of electricity, Bombay rapidly became a westernised city of cosmopolitan character.

The American Civil War under the leadership of Abraham Lincoln had another seminal impact on the intellectuals of Maharashtra who were wary of racial prejudice of the English rule. The issue in the war was the apartheid of the African black slaves in America with Lincoln espousing the cause of the downtrodden blacks and fighting against slavery. Prominent among many youths who drew inspiration from the civil war and Abraham Lincoln was, as mentioned earlier, Phule, the pioneering social reformer and crusader against Brahminical dominance.

The new industries, particularly the textile mills which employed people in thousands, gave rise to a new class of people hitherto unknown to Maharashtra (India)—the industrial worker. The workers employed in the mills were neither skilled artisans (who worked on traditional handlooms for generations and produced excellent cotton or silk cloth famous for its texture, design and fineness throughout the world) nor the educated people. In Bombay and elsewhere, they came mostly from peasant stocks from the interior villages. Brutally exploited, their plight was as bad or worse as the mine workers of England of the early 19th century whose depredations are chronicled in graphic details.

It was but natural, therefore, that the first trade union movement of industrial workers in India should originate in Bombay. Phule, though residing in Pune, took interest in

the plight of these workers as he was fully aware of their conditions. Many peasants from his own district and from neighbouring Satara had migrated to Bombay to earn living as mill workers. Phule encouraged his associate Narayan Meghaji Lokhande to organise the workers in order to articulate the injustices perpetrated against them and to seek justice. The organisation raised by Phule's associates, thus, may be described as the first trade union organisation of industrial workers in India.

### **Far Reaching Impact**

This rapid pace of developments had another dimension, dark and disturbing. After the suppression of the 1857 insurgency, the new government's effort was to take all measures to avoid its repetition. Indian people were completely disarmed by the Queen's government. Even the farmers found it difficult to retain certain sharp equipment necessary for agricultural operations. No previous dispensation had so completely disarmed the people rendering them vulnerable to marauders and dacoits. On the other hand, with the import of finer cloth from Manchester and later with establishment of textile mills in India, the traditional cottage industry of handlooms spread all over India employing millions of artisans faced dire distress. Literally hundreds and thousands of weavers, yarn makers, handloom workers and others engaged in allied activities were thrown out of livelihood over a short period of a few decades.

The new government introduced the system of paying agricultural cess in cash at higher rates fixed in advance while in previous regimes, the cess was flexible from year to year and was to be paid in terms of the produce. As it is, agriculture in most areas of Western India has been completely dependent on the vagaries of monsoon. One bad monsoon would spell distress for a poor peasant who would



be forced to borrow money for sustenance and seeds for the next season. The new system completely devastated small and medium landholders of Maharashtra.

Penury forced the peasants in millions to pawn or sell their valuables, utensils, households and ultimately their pieces of land to pay the cess in bad seasons. The frequency of bad monsoon years, droughts or even famines was mercilessly regular. Most of the farmers thus, were now thrown at the mercy of the big landlords and moneylenders. When the cotton prices had soared high, the government had increased the cess which remained static even when the prices collapsed within a few years. The distress of peasants became unbearable. That was the time when a new class hitherto unknown to India emerged—the agricultural labourer. That was a consequence of the government's policies as the scholars believe. A book, *The World of the Rural Labourer in Colonial India* edited by Gyan Prakash (Oxford), delineates in great detail this development.

### 'The Idyllic Republics' Disturbed

Charles Metcalfe, one of the great early English rulers of India, described in 1830 India as a collection of 'idyllic, self-sufficient and unchanging little republics'. Karl Marx, Henry Maine, Baden-Powell constructed their theories on India on this formulation. The British began the census enumeration in their domain in 1871-72 which gave rise to a new colonial sociology. Conforming to Metcalfe's formulation, it depicted India as a configuration of occupational groups. From there the concept of 'village community' was evolved. Framed in this sociology, agricultural labourers emerged as a separate category from the 1881 census.

A report later in 1930 showed that the proportion of agricultural labourers was far higher in Madras and Bombay Presidencies than that in the northern India. Chief factor for this disparity, according to scholars is that the British regime

settled much earlier in these Presidencies. The rates and method of agricultural cess collection, land settlements together with disintegration of village communities and traditional form of agrarian societies—all this triggered terrible process of devastation of farmers and village life increasing the number of agricultural labourers. No other regime hitherto had disturbed the rural society so violently.

The growing restlessness and discontent of the exploited peasants exploded in violence in drought-prone areas of Shirur in Pune district in 1876, when a prolonged famine had caused widespread devastation in large parts of Western Maharashtra. Droughts and famines had become chronic visitors not only to Maharashtra but to most other parts of the country. Between 1850 and 1870, an estimated 5 million people had died of starvation during famines in the sub-continent. An acute shortage of food grains and fodder during the first few months of the 1876-77 famine caused the death of 7,000 people in the districts of Pune and Ahmednagar alone. An untold number of cattle perished in the famine. Angry farmers began attacking the houses of moneylenders and burning papers and records containing distress land deals. The violence rapidly spread to neighbouring districts of Ahmednagar, Satara and Sholapur.

This was the first large scale violent uprising of the rural peasantry after 1857 though the English officers preferred to describe the episode as "Riots of the Deccan Peasants". It was during this distress that Phadke, the rebel youth mentioned earlier, tried without much success, to give the unrest a wider nationalistic dimension by promising the return of the Peshwa rule and organising armed groups to attack the exploiting big landlords and moneylenders. As for the violent peasants themselves, the reaction of the administration was predictable. The government lent security to the moneylenders and big landlords while ruthlessly curbing the farmers.

By 1876-77, the Marathi newspapers and periodicals published from Bombay and Pune had begun to take a keen interest in the happenings in the rural areas. Graphic accounts of depredations caused by the drought and the farmers' inhuman exploitation by moneylenders and government officers, often hand-in glove, were published by many journals. Under the public pressure, the administration relented somewhat. As an afterthought and to pacify the rural sentiments, the government made a legislation imposing certain restrictions on the moneylenders. Expectedly, the curbs remained only on paper and the exploitative system continued as before.

#### Exploitative Alien Rule

By this time, the new class of western educated intellectuals in Maharashtra, which, initially was deeply enamored and awed by everything that the English had brought to India, had slowly begun to realise that the devastation of the agriculture, the plight of the peasants, economic distress of the middle class, pauperisation of large sections of population including artisans and craftsmen was not caused by any natural calamity. These depredations and indeed the overall degeneration of the Indian sub-continent was rather the consequence of the exploitative alien administration, its unbearable taxation, methods of levying agricultural cess and systematic decimation of the native trade, crafts and enterprise. The new thinkers and intellectuals had begun to criticise the government increasingly.

Justice Ranade was perhaps the first Indian critic of the colonial economy. Ranade submitted a petition to the British Parliament in 1874 through the 'Sarvajanik Sabha', a body established by him, to demand a responsible government and inclusion of Indian representatives in Parliament. Another great son of Bombay, Dadabhai Naoroji wrote extensively in British periodicals and newspapers to expose

the disastrous consequences of the colonial rule on the Indian economy. Later in 1893, Naoroji had the honour of being the first Indian getting elected to the British Parliament from a constituency in England. Vishnushastri Chiplunkar, a formidable writer with devastating rhetorical skills, persuaded the people through his writings that Indians could never see better days till the colonial rule lasted. India was living in slavery and slaves had no right to see dreams. He thus aroused the self-respect of the Indian intellectuals with his scathing criticism of the British rule as well as the Marathi intellectual class which venerated the English.

It was this ambience that led to the establishment of the Indian National Congress in Bombay on December 25, 1885. Not only in Maharashtra—Bombay and Pune, but also in Bengal and Madras Presidencies young and radical nationalist intellectuals were becoming increasingly aware of the futility of seemingly benevolent legislations, gentlemanly critique of colonial governance, petitions, submissions and token protests. The old groups and associations such as the Bombay Association, Madras Native Association and the British Indian Association of Bengal were losing their radical edge and becoming moribund. In Bombay, younger radicals like K.T. Teland and Pherozeshah Mehta disassociated from the older group. Poona Sarvajanik Sabha carried on with its nationalist agenda, a new organisation called Indian Association was founded in Bengal in 1876. The Madras Mahajan Sabha came into being in 1884.

These younger radicals were quick to understand that lack of coordinated effort at sub-continental level was a major shortcoming in their endeavour. Thus the spirit of India as a single national entity was beginning to arise almost simultaneously in Maharashtra, in Bengal and in Madras. A new political ethos was being born as explicitly articulated by the nationalist newspapers such as *Kesari* and *Mahratta* in Maharashtra, *The Hindu* in the South, *Anand Bazar Patrika*

and *Bengalee* in Bengal and *Tribune* in the North. Historically it was a ripe moment for the birth of a political organisation which should comprehensively represent the opinion of the Indian people as a whole and boldly confront the colonial rulers from a nationalist pedestal.

### A Myth Demolished

Thus, foundation of the Indian National Congress (INC) was not an accident nor the outcome of the schemings of the manipulative British. It was the culmination of a political process witnessed in previous decades across the sub-continent. This point needs to be stressed because of the prevalence of a strong myth through history chronicles, scholarly books and history textbooks that INC was the "brainchild" of Lord Dufferin, the then Governor General, and that the retired English ICS officer, Allen Hume, at the former's behest, took unusual interest in shaping the organisation with the hidden intention of subverting the revolutionary upsurge that was building in the sub-continent. The myth has been amply exploited till recently by the political adversaries both on the right and the left to dub the INC as a hand-maiden, a loyalist organisation patronised and encouraged by the British to provide a safety valve for the public discontent. M.S. Golwalkar, the R.S.S. Chief in 1939 used this plank to attack Congress for its secularism and anti-nationalism. Some like Rajani Palme Dutt saw the culmination of the INC's role as ordained by the imperialists in the "final capitulation with the Mountbatten Settlement"!

However, latest research and authentic documents unearthed recently give a lie to this myth. Prof. Bipan Chandra, eminent historian and thinker, in his book *India's struggle for Independence*, has convincingly demolished the story consigning it forever to the dustbin of history. It was indeed A.O. Hume, who more or less played the role of a

catalytic agent in facilitating the radical nationalist spread across India to come together and launch an all-India organisation. But Hume was an honourable man committed to liberal democratic ideas whom Dufferin in 1886 described as "cleverish and a little cracked". Dufferin, never sympathetic to the Congress, attacked the organisation viciously soon after its formation.

One must acknowledge the objective conditions of the era when the INC was born. As Prof. Chandra points out, there were very few political persons in India in early 1880's and the tradition of open opposition to the rulers was not yet firmly entrenched. "Courageous and committed persons like Dadabhai Naoroji, Justice Ranade, Pherozeshah Mehta, G. Subramania Iyer and Surendranatha Banerjee (one year later) cooperated with Hume because they did not want to arouse official hostility at such an early stage of their work...."

Prof. Chandra also cogently quotes G.K. Gokhale's observations in 1913 on the issue. Gokhale had explicitly said that if the founder of the Congress had not been a great Englishman and a distinguished ex-official, such was the distrust of political agitations in those days that the authorities would have at once suppressed the movement. In the words of Prof. Chandra, ".... if Hume and other English liberals hoped to use the Congress as a safety valve, the Congress leaders hoped to use Hume as a lightning conductor. And as later developments show, it was the Congress leaders whose hopes were fulfilled."

### Birth of the Congress

Like the Indian leaders, Hume was acutely aware of the need to coordinate the activities of the nationalists organisations in all the regions of the sub-continent and express the opinion of the Indian people in the one voice. Establishment of a coordinating body was being vaguely

discussed by the leaders and in the Indian newspapers when Hume gave a concrete shape to this proposal.

Hume first discussed the proposal with the people and leaders of Maharashtra and Bombay. Justice Ranade and Dr. Bhandarkar of Pune, Ferozeshah Mehta, Naoroji, Kashinath Trimbak Telang and Dinshaw Wachha of Bombay wholeheartedly gave their support. And since Pune was fast emerging as the new centre of socio-cultural and political activity, it was decided to hold the first session of the Congress there. Justice Ranade, on behalf of the *Sarvajanik Sabha* took the responsibility of organising the event. The social and political workers of the city enthusiastically collected funds for the purpose. A reception committee was set up. And just when everything was ready to hold the session, the scourge of cholera struck Pune. The venue was shifted to Bombay with Bombay Presidency Association accepting the organisational responsibilities.

The first historic session of the Indian National Congress, now the longest surviving political party of the world, was thus held at Gokuldas Tejpal Hall near Gowalia Tank in Bombay on December 28, 1885. The leaders and social workers from Bombay and Maharashtra, had greatly contributed in organising the session. Prominent Maharashtrians among those who attended the session were Naoroji, Mehta, Waccha, Rahimtulla Sayani, N.G. Chandavarkar, President of Pune Sarvajanik Sabha Krishnaji Noolakar, Telang, Agarkar and several editors of Marathi newspapers of Pune and Bombay. Justice Ranade and Dr. Bandarkar, principal of Pune's Deccan College, were also present but their names do not figure in the official list because of a technical difficulty—they were government servants. Hume himself proposed Omeshchandra Banerjee of Calcutta as the President of the session. Subrahmaniam Aiyer of Madras and Telang of Bombay seconded.

And thus in cosmopolitan Bombay, described as

'mini-India' began the first meeting of the organisation which eventually was to lead India's freedom struggle. Perhaps for the first time in the history of India, prominent thinkers, intellectuals, social and cultural leaders coming from all corners of the Indian sub-continent has congregated at one place to deliberate on the future of India and on issues that affected the people's lives here. How representative of India was this first gathering could be judged from the attendance.

Apart from 18 delegates from Bombay and 9 from Pune, there were 6 from Surat, 8 from Madras, 3 each from Calcutta and Lucknow, 2 each from Karachi, Ahmedabad, Tanjavore and Agra and 1 each from Viramgaon, Lahore, Ambala, Banaras, Allahabad, Behrampore, Macchalapattanam, Chingalpet, Madurai, Tirunelveli, Coimbatore, Kumbhakonam, Salem, Cudappa, Anantapur, Ballari and Simla. More significantly, while the President of the first Session Banerjee was a Christian, President of the second session was Naoroji, a Parsi, and of the third was Badruddina Taiyyabji, a Muslim. The concept of India as one nation was practically taking shape in this congregation.

Accounts of the first session of the Congress in Bombay say that it ended with delegates heartily shouting the slogan, "Long live Queen Victoria". With hindsight, we can understand the anxieties of the Congress leaders as articulated much later by Gokhale. However, at the same venue of Gowalia Tank in Bombay, another session of the burgeoning organisation was held 57 years later, in 1942, where the Indian National Congress Party, then under the undisputed leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, gave an ultimatum to the colonial rulers to "quit India".

The birth of the all-India political organisation was a great leap forward in the political history of India. It was the beginning of the historic process of shaping of India into a nation. The leaders gathered at Gowalia Tank in



Bombay on December 25, 1885, were not only fully conscious of this process, they also knew that it was going to be a long, difficult journey. For they were aware of the mind-boggling diversity of India found in no other part of the world. It was a unique experiment in the world history to weave together into a nation such wildly heterogeneous regions and identities. That was how the leaders decided to rotate the Congress sessions among different regions of the sub-continent. The President was to belong to region other than where the session was held. To ensure religious harmony, the Congress in 1888 made a rule that no resolution would be passed to which an overwhelming majority of Hindu or Muslim delegates objected.

These moves indeed indicated the fundamental grasp of the unique Indian reality by leaders gathered in Mumbai. That to develop and propagate an anti-colonial nationalist ideology was their primary objective was obvious. But the moves above clearly show that they were intent upon laying the foundations of a secular and democratic movement. Congress is now acknowledged as the oldest political party in the world. It survived the vagaries of a turbulent world for 120 years no less because of the vision of those wise men gathered in Bombay in 1885 than because of the strength lent to it by latter visionaries such as Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru.

The second session of the Congress was held in Calcutta under the presidentship of Naoroji. The contingent from Maharashtra was the largest. For the next many years the high numerical strength of the Maharashtra contingent and presence of many Maharashtra leaders, soon well-known all over India, at the Congress sessions remained a stabilising force for the fledgling body. What was significant, representatives from all corners of Maharashtra, including those in the Bombay Presidency and Nagpur-Berar area of Central Province, had begun to attend the Congress.



Ajanta Cave



Shaniwar Wada, Pune





Shivaji's statue at Fort Rajgarh



Markandēswar Mandir, near Godchiroli



World Famous Kailash Cave, Ellora



Tryambakeshwar Temple





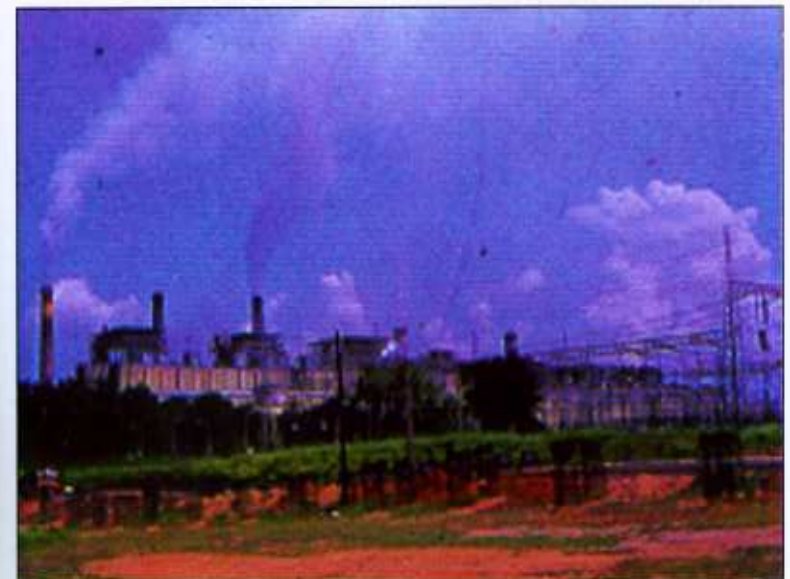
Literally millions flocked to the employment guarantee schemes when a severe draught hit Maharashtra



A statue of Shivaji



Gate Way of India



Industrial Estate, near Nagpur



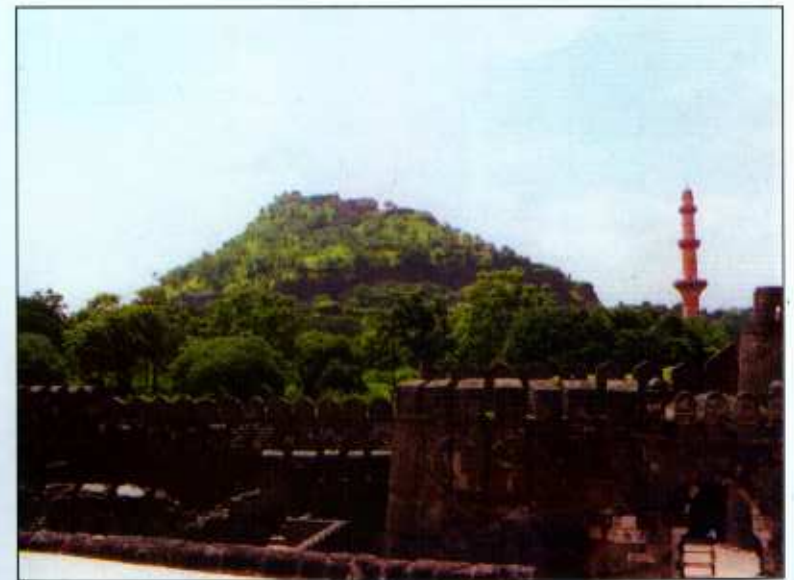
Bal Gandharva



Pandharpur temple complex



A cooperative sugar mill, harbinger of rural prosperity



The Fort of Daulatabad or Devgiri near Aurangabad





A typical watershed management project in western Maharashtra



Percolation tank being built by EGS workers



Rajabai Tower, University of Mumbai



Madiya girl





Winds of change: Harnessing wind power near Satara



Vishnu D Paluskar



Bird's paradise: Navegaon Bandh



Aerial view of Buitibori Industrial Area





Biwi Ka Maqbara, Aurangabad



Gurudwara, Nanded

At the Bombay Congress held in 1889, Bombay Presidency had 821 and Nagpur-Berar 214 representatives attending the session. There were women, farmers and artisans in these contingents. A significant event at the Bombay session was a demonstration held by Jotiba Phule's *Satyashodhak Samaj* of Pune. The *Samaj* led a *morcha* at the session to draw attention of the Congress to the pauperism and deprivation of the peasants of Maharashtra. An effigy of a peasant was erected just outside the gate of the venue. Phule's march underscored the reality of alienation of the educated middle class Congress leaders from the peasants, the deprived and the exploited have-nots of the country.

### The Other Voices

Indeed, while the Congress was busy making resolutions, sending petitions to the government and debating issues which barely concerned the rural masses, other voices were being raised to articulate the grievances of the people. These rarely found echo in the Congress sessions. One such voice was that of Phule who, as noted earlier, gave vent to his resentment in a dramatic manner at the Bombay Congress in 1889. Another voice was that of Tilak who wanted to make the Congress more people-oriented and dynamic in voicing their problems and grievances rather than taking a passive petitioners approach and being a mere debating society of the elites. In the last decade of the 19th century and in subsequent years, Tilak and Gopal Krishna Gokhale were the shining stars of Pune who had acquired national stature. They symbolised two extreme views struggling to assert in the Congress forum.

While Gokhale was a quintessential moderate with complete faith in constitutional means, Tilak, by contrast, was a firebrand leader who endeavoured to galvanise masses in order to create political awareness and make the political struggle for self-rule more effective. Soon Tilak was to lead

the radical group within the Congress with the conflict culminating in a split between the radicals and the moderates at the Surat Congress in 1907. True to his spirit, Gokhale at the young age of 30 effectively presented before a Parliamentary commission in London the plight of the Indian economy, the deprivation of the farmers, joblessness of the urban poor and particularly the depredations that a severe famine was causing in Western Maharashtra. Tilak blasted the Government through his newspaper *Kesari*, stormed the mofussil areas of Maharashtra with lightening tours and powerful speeches articulating in strongest terms the rising discontent of the masses. He instituted the practice of celebrating the Ganesh festival on mass scale as a means of mobilising the people to educate them politically and socially. Similarly, he encouraged people to celebrate Shivaji's birth anniversary.

The objective of both these festivals, as Tilak insisted on many occasions and through his writings in *Kesari* was neither religious nor sectarian. In a repressive colonial rule, such occasions afford opportunity to galvanise people for the national cause and infuse among them the spirit of nationalism. Tilak believed that any method which strengthened the national movement was worth supporting and he did not mind when his fire-eating articles in *Kesari* hitting out at the Government's highhanded and insensitive handling of the scourge of plague in Western Maharashtra inspired hot-headed nationalist youths to take to arms. Two young brothers, Damodar and Balkrishna Chaphekar, killed with a pistol a high official and his deputy responsible for atrocities while searching Pune households for victims of plague. The occasion was a grand party at the Governor's house in Pune to celebrate the 60th anniversary of Queen Victoria's coronation on 22 June 1897. Chaphekar brothers were caught and hanged.

Tilak's editorials became more trenchant and harshly

critical of the Government. Soon he was arrested on the charge of treason. The historic court case that followed attracted nation-wide attention. Eminent people of Calcutta such as Rabindranath Tagore, Congress President Surendranath Banerjee, 'Amrit Bazar Patrika' editor Motilal Ghosh took lead in collecting funds to defend Tilak in the Court. In England, Prof. MaxMuller, Naoroji, Ramesh-chandra Dutt, Sir Richard Garth, William Hunter sent a petition to the Queen seeking Tilak's release. Prayer meetings were held at various places in India including Madras and Lucknow. Tilak was sentenced to one-and-half year of rigorous imprisonment. The case, however, had brought about a revelation. People of India, irrespective of language, region, caste or religion, were united and spoke in single voice on the issue of Tilak's incarceration.

The 'other' voice, other than that of the moderates like Gokhale and the radicals of Tilak's ilk, was also being heard in Maharashtra. The voice of the young patriotic revolutionaries who did not believe in constitutional means and felt that only an armed struggle would drive away the colonialists. Like in Bengal and Punjab, groups of dedicated young men in Maharashtra had begun searching for arms, pistols, bombs and explosives. One such fiery revolutionary inspired by Tilak's writings was Vinayak Damodar Sawarkar. Despite his controversial championship of Hindutva and Hindu Rashtra in the latter part of his life, Sawarkar is remembered as a radical revolutionary who inspired hundreds of groups all over India to meet the British might with arms.

As a believer in armed revolution, Sawarkar failed as most other groups in India had on account of lack of organisational skill. Also it was quixotic to challenge the organised strength of the British Empire, the most powerful country in the world, with a few pistols, hand grenades and a handful of men fired with nationalist zeal. But his fierce

patriotism, revolutionary dreams and total dedication to the spirit of India made Sawakar an icon of hundreds and thousands of young men. Sawarkar's life and contribution is related briefly elsewhere in this book.

### The Mahatma Casts Spell

Gandhi began moulding the Congress organisation and shaping the freedom struggle according to his ideas from the Ahmedabad Congress session of 1921. He was given the status of a "dictator" by the party to bring discipline, purpose and a focus to the freedom movement. Next year, he was charged of "treason" and sentenced to six years of imprisonment. The classic defense that Gandhi made in the court inspired thousands of people in Maharashtra to follow in his path, break the British law and fill the prisons with pride.

The "*zenda satyagraha*" of Nagpur in April 1923 triggered similar agitations to raise the tricolour of Indian freedom. Nagpur's freedom activists, led by Mancharsha Awari, Ambulkar Guruji and Jamnalal Bajaj went in a procession of thousands through the city carrying the flag and shouting patriotic slogans. The intention was to install the flag at the civic secretariat. When the defiant procession reached the place, mounted police unleashed a brutal lathi charge injuring and mistreating the leaders. Undeterred, waves after waves of young people including women surged forward carrying the banner and silently suffering the police blows. "*Zenda satyagraha*" created a surge of similar defiance in Maharashtra and all over India.

Gandhi's freedom struggle was not a movement in isolation. He had launched a plethora of constructive activities to build a new society—self-help through *khadi* and *charkha*, self-sufficient *ashrams* to instill material and spiritual discipline among the youth, denial of luxurious life, cleanliness campaigns, women's emancipation, attack on the

scourge of untouchability and so on. In Maharashtra, Gandhi found a fertile soil where thousands of young men and women abandoned their careers to join the multi-faceted movement.

That was why Gandhi often fondly described Maharashtra as the beehive of social workers. Spread of *khadi kendras* and *charkha sanghs* was rapid and many homes, wealthy and poor, hummed with the music of *charkha*. From Gondia to Alibag and from Dhule to Sholapur, Maharashtra responded wholeheartedly to Gandhi's call. Hundreds of men and women set up ashrams to provide medical help, succor and care for the sick and the old. Voluntary groups came up to propagate abstinence of alcohol and gambling. School children, housewives took out early morning processions through towns and villages singing songs of freedom and self-help.

### Salt Satyagraha

Through this movement emerged several institutions and groups of voluntary workers all over Maharashtra dedicating their lives and energies to selfless service of the society and to the cause of freedom. Some set up schools to promote nationalist education; others abandoned all material life to dedicate fully to serve the leprosy-affected. Some others devoted their lives to temperance movement or amelioration of the untouchables. To give a list of a few such inspired souls would be doing injustice to thousands of others. No district and indeed no village in Maharashtra had remained untouched with the patriotic fervor and the spirit of selfless service generated by Mahatma Gandhi.

And so when Gandhi launched his famous Dandi March and the Salt Satyagraha, whole of Maharashtra erupted like a volcano, though its energy confined to non-violent methods prescribed by Gandhi. Mumbai, Nagpur, Pune, Sholapur, Yavatmal, Amalner, Karad, Satara,

Chandrapur... people rose like a giant tide in defiance of the colonial rule and its unjust laws. Hardly had any other political movement till then had evoked so comprehensive and full-throated a response from all sections of the people. Only the Quit India movement of 1942 could stand comparison in this respect. Apart from Bombay, most towns, cities and villages on Maharashtra's seashore, defied the government to collect salt and court arrests in thousands.

The Wadala salt pans of Bombay became a battleground between unarmed volunteers shouting "Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai" and lathi and truncheon-wielding police. Over 15,000 people congregated at the salt pans and hundreds among them, bloodied, mauled and fractured with police lathis, reached the pans and picked up salt amid joyful shouts. Similar scenes were witnessed at Shiroda, a small seafront town in South Konkan where *satyagrahis* from all over Maharashtra had gathered to defy the salt law.

### A Non-violent Eruption

Those centers which had no sea shore used innovative means to demonstrate solidarity with the movement. In Pune, Nasik, Ahmednagar, Satara and elsewhere mammoth meetings were held to distribute salt as a symbolic gesture of defiance. Thousands courted arrest. In the Dahihandi village of Akola district, the *satyagrahis* including a large number of women targeted a heavy water well courting arrest in hundreds. Elsewhere, freedom fighters launched *jungle satyagraha* as approved by Gandhi and courted arrest by symbolically cutting grass or timber. A large number of people in Vidarbha, under the leadership of *Lokanayak* M.S. alias Bapuji Aney, a dedicated Tilakite turned staunch Gandhian, entered the freedom struggle in this agitation. Chandrapur, Dharasani, Madhan, Amravati, Yavatmal, Pusad, Darvha, Hinganghat.... each district or taluka place in Vidarbha has legendary tales of how unarmed non-violent

masses faced police lathis and bullets silently.

The most notable event of the jungle satyagraha was recorded in Bilashi of Satara district which is described in the annals of freedom movement as the rebellion of Bilashi. The simple people of Bilashi brought a long timber pole from a neighbouring jungle, placed it at the centre of the village as a flag staff and raised a glorious tri-colour. The police came in force to uproot the flag pole. For the next fifty days, the people of Bilashi gave their sweat and blood and battled with the police to defend and protect the symbol of freedom from the repeated armed attacks of the constabulary. Two died, 4 vanished, 42 were seriously injured and about 1000, among them several women, were hurt in police atrocities. Baglan and Chankapur in Nasik district, Akola and Sangamner in Ahmednagar district and Chirner in Raigad district are also remembered for fierce jungle agitations.

Sholapur, a textile town of South Maharashtra erupted with defiant processions and shouting of slogans. People raised the flag of freedom wherever they could. They also started cutting timber in the neighbouring jungle. The police opened fire in which 13 people died. An enraged mob set fire to a police chowky and a court building. Troops were called and the town pacified only after marshal law was clamped.

On January 26, 1931, the anniversary of the independence day as decided by the Congress at Lahore, people all over India raised the tri-colours in defiance of the government restrictions. At Azad Maidan in Bombay thousands gathered early in the morning holding aloft the flags and shouting spirited slogans. A large police force wielded lathis to prevent them holding demonstrations. Limbs, legs, backs and skulls broke, the maidan was awash with the blood of the patriots. But waves after waves of flag-bearing volunteers kept on entering the maidan. Not



one person raised hand in violence against the police. The police opened fire several times. It was a model demonstration of peaceful civil disobedience.

### **Quit India**

The All India Congress Committee which met in Bombay on August 7 and 8, 1942, passed the historic 'Quit India' resolution. It demanded immediate end to the British rule in India and called on all Indians who desired freedom to strive for the same. In the night of August 8 and 9, the police arrested Mahatma Gandhi, most members of the working committee, leaders of Bombay and a large number of prominent Congress activists everywhere. Several ordinances were issued banning the Congress Committee, provincial Congress committees and most volunteer corps. News of the arrests of leaders acted like a spark igniting a forest fire.

In the morning of August 9, Bombay, the whole of Maharashtra and the country burst into a spate of strikes, processions and protest demonstrations. 'Do or die', that was the message of Gandhi and thousands in Maharashtra rushed to fulfill the Mahatma's promise. The government had thought that arrests of major leaders would dampen the movement. But that proved to be a miscalculation. Many British commentators have compared the wide range of the 1942 upsurge to the disturbances of 1857 in as much as the movement had made governance difficult for the rulers.

Bombay was the epicenter of the Quit India agitation. From early morning, textile workers and railway workshop employees struck work and came out on the streets. Trains halted and factories closed. As the police tried to control angry mobs, trains and buses were set to fire. The public transport system of the metropolis collapsed. The police opened fire several times during the day. Several women and young girls were felled by the police machine guns when

they tried to march in thousands to the historic Chowpatty sands in a procession to raise the tri-colour. That did not deter other processionists in achieving their objective.

Elsewhere in Maharashtra, groups began attacking police vehicles and chowkies. Means of communication, rail roads, telegraph and telephone wires and poles were damaged. Angry people ransacked some government offices and set them ablaze. The police retaliated with brutal violence. The people of Pune came on the streets in so overwhelmingly large numbers that the administration collapsed and the army was called out. On each street and in each lane, the police or the troops were engaged in skirmishes. Pune was a battleground for nearly six days when the writ of the British government did not run. Six people died in police firing. Ammunition depots at nearby Dehu Road and Wanawadi were set ablaze and a goods train carrying ammunition and other military ware was derailed in the Khandala Ghats.

### **Underground Movement**

Even as the top leaders were put behind bars, groups of young radicals went underground from where they coordinated the agitation. Prominent among the underground radicals were S.M. Joshi, N.G. Gore, Acyutrao Patwardhan, Shirubhau Limaye, Anutai Limaye, Vasantrao Tulpule, Kamlabai Bhagwat etc. A bomb went off in the Capitol cinema house in the cantonment area of the city killing three white soldiers. Shirubhau Limaye was arrested in this connection. At many places, Gandhiji's strict dictat of non-violence was violated by angry leaderless mobs.

Nagpur was put under curfew as textile workers struck work, shops and offices downed shutters and huge processions criss-crossing the city broke out into mobs running helter-skelter. People cut trees, pipes and telephone poles to put obstacles on the streets to thwart the army and

the police. On August 12, a morcha went straight to the secretariat and ransacked the offices. The treasury at the railway station was looted and several police chowkies went up in flames. For six days, Nagpur reverberated with slogans, and sounds of bullets. Four youths were arrested for attacking a police chowky where one policeman died. Shankar Mahale was sent to the gallows while four other young men were sentenced to life imprisonment.

A group of radicals in Bombay set up a clandestine make-shift radio transmitter unit and began broadcasting from the *Azad Radio* the messages of freedom. It took the police three months to track the transmitter and arrest the group led by Usha Mehta, well-known Gandhian. Similar freedom radio centers had erupted in Pune, Calcutta and Delhi.

#### **Patri Sarkar—The Rural Turbulence**

The agitation was not confined to cities and towns. The spirit of freedom had penetrated nooks and corners of rural Maharashtra and some of the glorious episodes of the Quit India struggle in the rural areas have become legends occupying important place in the history of freedom movement. The *Prati-Sarkar* (Patri-Sarkar) or the alternate government established by a group of radical peasants led by a legendary veteran Nana Patil in parts of Satara district is one such episode. The group supported by the poor peasantry declared itself a government, raised money by systematically looting government treasuries and set up its own informal fighting units armed with guns, spears, lathis and swords. These named as 'Tufan Sena' and 'Azad Sena'.

For nearly three years the writ of the *Prati Sarkar* ran in the large parts of the district. It spread terror among the exploiting moneylenders, traders and government servants, rendered justice by punishing the exploiters and provided such other help and services as possible to peasants

distressed by a series of droughts. Stung by the challenge to its sovereignty hurled by a group of mere villagers, the British government used every means to crush the rebellion. For nearly three years, the police could not penetrate the group and it was only after the situation mellowed when Nana Patil along with his group surfaced in Bombay in May 1946 for a mammoth reception organised by the workers of the city.

The many brave exploits of the *Prati-Sarkar* of Satara have become a matter of legends and folklores in Western Maharashtra. The leaders who emerged unscathed from the armed revolution acquired respect and an unusual hallow among the people. Among the close associates of Nana Patil were leaders who had their own following such as Nagnath Naikawdi, G.D. Laud, Rambhau Laud, Umashankar Pandya, Barde, Pandu Master, Kashinath Deshmukh, Y.C. Patil, Shaikh Kaka, Dhondiram Mali, Madhavrao Jadhav, D.M. Lohar, Kisan Veer, Y.B. Chavan and Vasantrao Patil.

No wonder, the district of Satara has acquired a prominent place in the politics of Maharashtra after independence. Eventually, Y.B. Chavan became the chief minister of bi-lingual Bombay State and later of Maharashtra. Still later, he held the defense, home external affairs and finance portfolios at the centre before becoming the deputy prime minister for a short stint. Between 1960 and 1972, he was the undisputed leader of Maharashtra. Vasantrao Patil, better known as Vasantdada, was the man of the masses who held the state's chief ministership thrice.

#### **The Spirit of Freedom**

Vasantdada, who led a radical peasants' group in the feudal state of Sangli, was arrested in June 1943 and put in the Sangli prison. A month later, Vasantdada and his dozen associates disarmed the police in the jail and broke out by jumping into the swollen Krishna river from the prison



ramparts. The group crossed the river, ran through the Sangli bazar and reached the banks of Warna river when the police caught up with it. In an exchange of fire, Vasantdada took a bullet in his shoulder, Anna Patravale, a 17 year old youth, was killed and Hindurao Patil broke his leg. Dada and Hindurao were nabbed by the police while others escaped.

To illustrate how the rural Maharashtra was fired with the spirit of freedom during the Quit India movement, it is enough to mention just a few villages whose names have left an imprint in the pages of history of freedom struggle. One is Yawali of Amravati district, a remote place of 2000 population, which fought the police for nearly a week to keep the tri-colour flying. The police repeatedly attacked the village to capture the flag while men, women and children repelled them with stones, sticks and slings in an organised manner. Nine young men became martyrs of freedom and 200 were injured, nearly 30 of them seriously. Hindus and Muslims both fought with unity and laid their lives for the flag.

Two villages in Chandrapur district, Chimur and Ashti, have also secured a niche in history. A huge morning procession of unarmed men and women on August 16 was halted by the police in Chimur. The police resorted to a violent lathi charge without any provocation injuring many processionists. When the people rushed to the Dak Bungalow to complain, the deputy tehasildar and the sub-divisional officer opened fire. The irate mob then threw stones at the bungalow, beat up the officers and set the building to fire. The two officers died. The police force rushed to the site and started firing indiscriminately. Five men died on the spot and several lay bleeding. The angry mob then turned to the police and two officers were killed in the melee. Chimur was not part of the British empire at least for three days. Later, 250 people were arrested on charges of murder. Twenty one were sentenced to death, 28 to life imprisonment

and several others to various terms. A fine of Rs. 10,000 was slapped on the village. Much later, the death sentences were commuted to life terms.

In nearby Ashti on the same day, a large number of unarmed people led by Ukandrao Bhoi and Kalekhan, went in a procession to hoist the flag at the police station. As the police opened fire and several bleeding satyagrahis fell down, people angrily attacked the police station. A constable was killed and an officer injured. One man, Udaram had died and several injured in the firing. Ten men including Bhoi and Kalekhan were sentenced to death. Later, the sentence was commuted.

About a 1000 kilometers away in Mahad in Konkan, four young men died and scores injured when the police fired at a peaceful procession. In the north at Nandurbar in Dhule district, five teenage students were killed when a procession of students was fired at by the police. At Matheran in Thane district, peasant leaders Bhai Kotwal and Hiraji Patil had set up a radical revolutionary group which specialised in sabotage by dismantling huge electric pylons. Their plan was to cut off the entire power supply of Bombay and Pune. Both were killed when the police attacked their secret den. Similarly, Ahmednagar town, Pathardi in Ahmednagar district, Gargoti and Hatkanangale near Kolhapur, Chinchani and Palghar in Thane district witnessed fierce struggles to hoist the sacred tri-colour. Scores of people laid their lives.

### **Quit India Movement**

The momentum of the Quit India struggle lasted in cities and mofussil towns for less than a year. But the simmering in Maharashtra villages continued longer. It was only after Mahatma Gandhi was released from jail unconditionally in May 1944 that the embers of fire started cooling down in rural Maharashtra.

According to the official estimates given to the then central assembly in February 1943, the police throughout India resorted to firing 538 times between August 9 and end of December 1942. A total number of 940 people were killed and 630 injured. The figures for persons arrested, convicted and detained all over India during this period were 60,229, 26,000 and 18,000 respectively. Throughout the country, 250 railway stations were damaged, 550 post offices attacked, 200 damaged and 50 burnt, 70 police stations burnt and 85 other government buildings were burnt.

To compare, we have figures for Bombay Presidency which included the whole of Gujarat and small pockets of Karnataka but excluded the Vidarbha and Marathwada regions of the present Maharashtra state. Even so, these figures of incidents for the year ending February 9, 1943, give us some idea of the monumental contribution made by Maharashtra to the Quit India movement. During the year, police fired on 195 occasions and killed 105 people injuring 332. In other incidents, five were killed and 557 injured while the army opened fire on 14 occasions killing eight and injuring 32.

The Quit India movement was the last phase of India's freedom struggle. It articulated the discontent of the people and their intense determination to be free of slavery. Even as the intensity of the agitation mellowed down in 1943, the British had realised that their days as the rulers of India were numbered. Sardar Patel, commenting on the great sweep of the movement, had said that never before had such widespread uprising had happened in India in the history of the British Raj. In less than five years, the British quit India.

## MAKERS OF MODERN MAHARASHTRA

It is not possible to acquaint readers in the brief space of this book with the entire galaxy of great men and women, thinkers, intellectuals, social reformers, leaders of men, artistes and entertainers who have made a deep impact on the history and people of Maharashtra and who continue to shape the thinking and ideas of the people. Maharashtra has been richly endowed with talented men and women who carved for themselves a place in the history of Maharashtra and India.

While reviewing the forces and personalities that molded Maharashtra's character and culture today, the lasting contribution of saint-poets cannot be overlooked. The cultured liberalism, the deep faith in universal brotherhood, spiritual equality and tolerance, the traits which distinctly manifest in rural Maharashtra in the form of the *Warkari sampradaya* today, owe much to the teaching of the saint poets who blazed a glorious era between the 13th and 18th century.

If the Maharashtrian male, particularly of the rural masses and ordinary peasantry, is less oppressive towards women and women live a less restricted life enjoying a freedom comparatively greater than their sisters do in the other parts of the country, the credit again goes to the influence of the mellow philosophies of these saintly poets. And also, contrary to the general perception of Maharashtrians being a rather 'sectarian, cantankerous and intolerant people who are aggressive, militant and rude', a perception shaped

perhaps on account of the campaigns in the North, East and South of the Maratha marauders of the uncertain period of the 18th century and because of the latest rash of the ugly religious strife and communal upsurge, the peasantry of Maharashtra is generally mild mannered, accommodative and quite tolerant. This characteristic too is attributed to the subtle impact of the teachings of saint poets.

### Female Saint Poets

The land also produced a galaxy of female saint-poets who had an equal space in the people's conscience. Although, none of them acquired the status and aura of a Meerabai, their contribution in enhancing liberal ambience and liberating women to some extent from the shackles of orthodoxy and slavery must not be overlooked.

Muktabai, the youngest among Jnaneshwar's kinds, Janabai, the so-called low caste disciple of sant. Namdeo, Bahinabai, Venabai, Soyarabai were some of the saintly women poets who not only lent a liberal dimension to the prevailing spiritual ambience but also expressed through their poetry the acute resentment of religious and social inequities, gender injustice and the cruel traditions then prevalent. Indeed, as many critics of literature observe, the female saint poets wrote neither for spiritual solace nor for aesthetic satisfaction. They, along with the male saint poets, were the true harbingers of social and religious reforms in Maharashtra.

Similarly, the teachings of Saint Ramdas, contemporary of Tukaram and Shivaji in the 17th century, though his Brahmin-centric thinking made him rather controversial in the context of the non-Brahmin upsurge in modern Maharashtra, cannot be ignored. Ramdas is credited with lifting Maharashtra from a passive spiritual stupor (ironically caused by an overdose of spiritual teachings by earlier saints) to bring it into the practical world. He is credited with

awakening the manly self-respect of the Maratha and infusing in him the determination to fight the foreign rulers to preserve his soul. In his poetry, he extolled Shivaji as a role model for the latter's political and social vision, his brave exploits, his idea of self-rule (swarajya), his discipline on the battlefield and in the court, his sense of justice and fair play.

Incidentally, a major part of Ramdas' writings essentially deals with tips for improving one's daily habits, style of living, dealing with enemies and friends, preserving one's self-respect, improving writing skills and so on. Ramdas was radically different from other saint poets in the sense he strongly advocated an action-oriented life, a *pravrittee* oriented life as against *nivrittee*, an indifference towards worldly affairs that had become the hallmark of the Indian society in the medieval period. Interestingly, some of his critics dismiss Ramdas as a crude originator of the 'How to.....' books of "How to Win Friends and Influence People" variety.

### People's War

Coming to the post-Shivaji era, we have a gallery of brave men and women who defended with great determination and valour Shivaji's Swarajya against the determined bid of Emperor Aurangzeb to annex the entire Deccan to his empire. After Shivaji's son Sambhaji was killed by the forces of Aurangzeb and the latter's brother Rajaram also died, Maharashtra became almost leaderless, ripe to fall in the hands of the Mogul forces. At that moment, Tarabai, the wife of Rajaram, rose to confront the military and economic might of Aurangzeb's forces. Under her leadership, Maharashtra almost waged a people's war harassing and inflicting damages on the Mogul army anywhere and everywhere and defended Shivaji's swarajya for nearly 27 years till Aurangzeb died a frustrated man on the soil of

Maharashtra near Daulatabad. To ignore Tarabai is to ignore this glorious history.

Later, when the Mogul empire began crumbling after the death of Aurangzeb and the Peshwas came to wield power in Pune, Marathas rose to control the throne of Delhi and made forays far into the North and the East. Peshwas Bajirao, Madhavrao, Sadashivrao, their satraps who established autonomous states like the Shindes of Gwalior, Gaikwads of Baroda, Bhosale's of Nagpur and Holkars of Indore have respective places in romantic Marathi legends.

Here we give brief sketches and contributions of a selected few who continue to inspire and are regarded ideals by the people. Some of the great personalities, such as Shivaji do not find place in this chapter because their life and contribution have been dealt with extensively earlier. There are many others who have left their imprint on the minds of Maharashtrians or have carved a niche in their hearts.

For example, Bhau Daji Laud of the early 19th century whose research material on Maharashtra's history would forever remain a reference point for historians; the great Indologist, Sanskrit scholar, social reformer and liberal pundit Sir Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar (1837-1925); another reformer and harsh critic of blind religious superstitions, Gopal Hari Deshmukh who wrote hard-hitting articles in the journal 'Prabhakar' in the pen-name of Lokahitawadi in the mid 19th century. His strident attack on the Brahminic hegemony and ignorance of the modern Brahmins, his scathing criticism of the Brahmin rule of the Peshwas, which according to him had snuffed out the creative spirit of the Maratha country, his open support to the British rule as a catalytic agent ushering in a new era of knowledge and culture, and his spirited championship of the new ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity had stirred vigorous intellectual debates among the contemporary

educated; Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, the first editor of *Kesari* before the two friends parted ways. Agarkar founded another journal, *Sudharak* to propagate his radical views on social reforms. Among the icons of the social reform movement in Maharashtra, Agarkar finds a prominent place along with Phule and Ambedkar.

Also, writers and poets such as Hari Narayan Apte, V.S. Khandekar, N.S. Phadke, Krishnaji Keshav Damle, V.V. Shirwadkar, Balkrishna Seetaram Mardhekar, P.L. Deshpande, the popular humorist who ruled Maharashtra's middle class heart for over four decades, Narayan Rajhans alias 'Balgandharva' the male actor and singer who set the sartorial styles and fashions of elite women of early 20th century and who is feelingly described as the romantic dream of Maharashtra; modern playwright Vijay Tendulkar, scholars and writers Durga Bhagwat, Irawati Karve, thespian, producer and director of vintage films V. Shantaram, the fairy-tale singers Lata Mangeshkar, Asha Bhosale, the legendary exponents of classical vocal music Gangubai Hangal, Abdul Karim Khan, Alladiya Khan, Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, Bhimsen Joshi, Kumar Gandharva (the latter two though of Kannada origin born in the neighbouring areas of Maharashtra have adopted Maharashtra as their 'karmabhoomi') and not to mention Sunil Gavaskar and Sachin Tendulkar.

Similarly, we shall be remiss without even mentioning some of the prominent personalities of the 20th century before and after independence. 'Karmaveer' Bhaurao Paygonda Patil for one, a product of Phule's original Satyashodhak Movement who built an elaborate network of schools in the mofussil areas of Maharashtra to educate the peasants' children; Vitthal Ramji Shinde who spent his life for educating the masses and breaking the hold of the caste on the society; Dr. Dhananjayrao Gadgil, whose progressive economic theories found expression in the cooperative

movements of peasants all over India; Vitthalrao Vikhe Patil, who by dint of perseverance, hard work and commitment to the cause of the poor farmers of the drought-prone areas organised and raised the first cooperative Sugar factory in India; Ramkrishna Bajaj and Shantanurao Kirloskar, the pioneering industrial entrepreneurs of whom there is a great dearth among the Marathi-speaking Maharashtrians.

### Jnaneshwar

After the darkness of the medieval period till end of the first millennium, it was Jnaneshwar who in the 13th century rose like a bacon to reinvent the spirit and self-respect of the 'Mahrattaa' people. He brought about a socio-cultural cohesion to the Marathi society and infused a fresh vigor into the Marathi language to take it to unassailable heights. Jnaneshwar consolidated a confused and fractionated society by vigorous propagation of the Bhakti cult. And long before the world got acquainted with the modern values of equality and fraternity, Jnaneshwar promoted, albeit on the spiritual plane, the concept of universal brotherhood and happiness of all mankind. Eight centuries after he took the *samadhi*, Jnaneshwar has a place in the hearts of the people and an intellectual aura which dazzles the poets, writers and the cultural elites today.

Jnaneshwar was preceded by the founder of the *Mahanubhav sampradaya*, Chakradhar Swami who between 9th and 10th century spread his message in early prakrit form of the Marathi language. The first Marathi book *Vivekasindhu* was written by "Adyakavi" Mukundaraj at the end of the Yadava era in A.D. 1180. While these writings made an impact, it was Jnaneshwar's life and writings, his message of universal brotherhood that provided an anchor on which a devastated society could stabilise itself. *Bhavartha Deepika*, better known as *Jnaneshwari*, his voluminous critique of the Bhagvadgeeta is regarded an unparalleled creation in

Marathi not only for the dexterity, power and sweetness of its poetic language but also for its superior aesthetic and moral stature, philosophical sweep and spiritual content.

**First Intellectual Rebel:** In Marathi literary lore, Jnaneshwar is extolled as the first intellectual rebel who challenged the hegemony of the religious orthodoxy, as also the monopoly of Sanskrit language as the only medium of religious and philosophical discourse. "My Marathi language (*prakrit*) can even beat the heavenly nectar in its recuperative power and sweetness", was Jnaneshwar's famous claim. Jnaneshwar demonstrated through his writings that even a profoundest philosophical discourse with complex nuances can easily be conducted in *prakrit* Marathi with equal competence. Jnaneshwar's astoundingly large and rich vocabulary, which has enormously enriched the Marathi language, continues to be a source of inspiration even to modern students. Many typical words, usages and grammatical forms used by him are still in vogue in the rural areas of Vidarbha and Marathwada regions.

They story of Jnaneshwar's life, though inspiring, throws a harsh light on the oppressive power of the religious orthodoxy of his times. Jnaneshwar was born in a spiritual family of Brahmin Kulkarni at Apegaon on the banks of Godavari. The family followed the *Nath* cult, prevalent in North India. This did not mitigate the cruel hardships Jnaneshwar and his siblings had to undergo. His father Vitthalpant soon after marriage lost interest in ordinary life, took to *sanyas* and went to Varanasi where he became the disciple of Sripadswami.

A few years later, Sripadswami, on pilgrimage to Rameshwar encountered Vitthalpant's wife Rukhmini by chance and blessed her that her wish to bear sons will be fulfilled. On being told of Rukhmini's predicament, the angry guru abandoned his pilgrimage, returned to Varanasi

and ordered Vitthalpant to go back home and follow the duties of *Grihastha Dharma*.

**Children of a Sanyasi:** Eventually, the couple bore four children, three sons—Nivrutti, Dnyandeo, Sopan—and a daughter Mukta. The four siblings were intellectually brilliant, deeply religious, wrote poetry and each one of them attained saintly stature. However, their father's "crime" of re-entering the *Grihastha Dharma* after taking to *sanyas* was frowned upon by the Brahmins who refused to grant Brahminhood to the sons and perform their thread ceremony. The society, particularly the Brahmins, boycotted and taunted them as 'irreligious and sinful' children of a *sanyasi*. The only way to wash the 'sin', the council of the Brahmins ordered, was the death of the perpetrator.

And so, Vitthalpant and Rukhminibai laid their lives by jumping into the sacred river Godavari. Even this did not satisfy the orthodoxy. The four siblings had to run from pillar to post to get their legitimacy sanctioned. Legend has it that when the Brahmins, even after acknowledging Dnyandeo's erudition, scholarship, mastery over shastras and Vedas refused to accept the children in their fold, Dnyandeo made a he buffalo on the street to recite some stanzas from the Veda. It was only then that the higher Brahmin council of Paithan gave the children a certificate of purity.

With these experiences behind him, Jnaneshwar in his *Bhavartha Deepika* and *Anubhavanmrut* champions the concept of universal brotherhood, equality of man before God and futility and injustice of the caste system. He wrote the critique of Geeta in Marathi to make the philosophy of the Vedas familiar to *sudras* and women who were denied that right by the *shastras*. Even the unfortunate women of flesh trade could drink the nectar of the Vedas through his Marathi rendering and attain salvation, he claimed.

Jnaneshwar is regarded a pioneer of the *bhakti sampradaya* in Maharashtra. The *warkari sampradaya*, an amorphous movement of the simple minded rural folk, mostly farmers, all devotees of the Lord Vithala, which transcends barriers of caste and creed, owes its progressive egalitarianism to Jnaneshwar's teachings. The four siblings were train blazers and were followed in subsequent centuries by a galaxy of saint poets—Eknath, Namdeo the tailor, Sawta Mali the floriculturist, Chokhamela the Mahar (untouchable), Sena the barber, Noor Mohammad the (Muslim) pinjari and Tukaram (vaishya, the trader)—all belonging to different castes.

Though the egalitarian concepts of universal brotherhood sans caste, creed and gender and equality of man before God, as preached by Jnaneshwar, largely remained confined to the spiritual domain, their essence has made a deep impact on the social psyche of Maharashtra. The powerful social reform movement of the 19th and 20th century also reflects the impact of the rebellion ushered in by Jnaneshwar and the saint poets that followed him.

### Tukaram

It can be said without exaggeration that half the population of Maharashtra does not go to bed without once chanting the mantra *Jnanoba-Tukaram*. The two saints are the household names amongst the peasantry and their poetry a part of their daily life. So profound has been their impact on the mind of Maharashtra that many may ignore praying to Lord Vithoba, the preferred deity of the two saints, to devoutly intone the chant—*Jnanoba-Tukaram*. Between them, Jnaneshwar and Tukaram, one a Brahmin and the other a *shoodra*, define the quintessential culture of Maharashtra... More than Shivaji or any other modern Marathi personality it is these two poets who have molded the egalitarian and liberal temperament of Maharashtra's peasantry. In the

Maharashtrian consciousness these two men, separated by a distance of four centuries, are inseparable and together they express the collective preaching of the galaxy of saint poets of different castes.

Jnaneshwar's association with common peasantry may be limited partly because of his background of Brahminic scholarship of Sanskrit scriptures. But there is hardly a village in Maharashtra where not even one peasant cannot recite from memory Tukaram's 'abhangs' in hundreds. Tukaram's poetry is acknowledged by modern critics as one of the most cogent and forthright expression of the Maratha ethos—profound and aesthetically satisfying and yet rugged and brutally frank, sometimes cantankerous challenging even the God's wisdom. Above all, it exudes through appealing imageries a direct preference for an egalitarian casteless society. Tukaram is not just a saint poet. He is a people's poet directly articulating their sentiments and angst against social, economic and spiritual inequities. Critics consider him the greatest poet Marathi language has produced.

**The Pinnacle:** Irawati Karve considers the *Warkari sampradaya* as the mainstream culture of Maharashtra. The saint poet Bahinabai imagines a metaphorical temple or an edifice of Marathi poetry, or indeed the Marathi culture. Jnaneshwar was the foundations of the edifice, Namdeo the strong plinth, Eknath the pillars and Tukaram the pinnacle, says the poet. Tukaram's many stanzas are adapted in Marathi as household sayings or as everyday usages. Many modern writers use Tukaram's *abhangs* to give titles to their novels, stories or plays.

A contemporary of Shivaji, Tukaram was born in 1608 in a small town of Dehu near Pune not far away from Alandi where Jnaneshwar had taken *Samadhi* four hundred years ago. Tukaram belonged to a small trader's family of *Vaishya-Vani* caste of the so-called *shoodra varna*. His father made

regular pilgrimages to Pandharpur. Tukaram married early in life and when the first wife died in a famine he took another wife, the legendary cantankerous Jijabai who loved her husband but hated his master, the Lord Vithoba. Large hearted and tender by nature, Tukaram was a total failure as a trader. He helped the poor generously. Clever people cheated him to the hilt. Calamities began bursting on the family. Tukaram's parents and his elder brother died leaving the family to Tukaram's care; a great famine ravaged the countryside. Tukaram's shop closed down and the family lived in distress.

It was then that Tukaram turned to meditation and started composing *abhangs*. His poetry is either a soliloquy, introspecting and pondering over vagaries of life, or dialogues with God. More profoundly moving are the dialogues where loudly proclaiming his loyalty and devotion to Vithoba, Tukaram questions God's wisdom, berates Him for His follies, curses Him for His mistakes, shouts at Him, argues and quarrels with Him for the social inequities and daily injustices of the world against the weak and the poor and generally articulates his own displeasure at God's strange ways. Tukaram is not an illiterate poet. His knowledge of the Vedas, Upanishadas and the Gita is extensive and deep and it inadvertently shows in his writings.

**Punishment:** People began gathering around him when he sang *bhajans* for his own solace. Soon he began rendering informal discourses, *kirtans*, to large audiences consisting of Brahmins and *shoodras* alike. His fame travelled far and wide. So appealing were his *abhangs* that men and women began humming them while performing their daily chores. Jnaneshwar, a Brahmin, had invited the ire of the Brahmin orthodoxy. Here Tukaram was a *shoodra* and he gave discourses, spoke of the Vedas, the Upanishadas, the Gita. A sacrilege!

The local priests and *kirtankars* became jealous as they found their earnings dwindling. Another learned Brahmin of Dehu, Rameshwar Bhatt, was furious with this *shoodra* who wrote poems expounding the contents of the Vedas and the Upanishadas. The Brahmins issued an injunction prohibiting Tukaram from writing poetry and ordered him to throw all his manuscripts in the river Indrayani. Tukaram had no alternative but to oblige.

The legend has it that Tukaram went on a fast on the bank of the river and the books surfaced undamaged at the end of 12 days. Whatever the story, the fact is Tukaram's *gathas* containing thousands of *abhangs* have survived four centuries. So overpowering was the magic of Tukaram's poetry and personality that many contemporary Brahmin scholars became his ardent disciples. But the spark of jealousy had not extinguished. His harassment at the hands of the orthodoxy continued. Folkore says Tukaram went to heaven bodily in the *pushpak viman* sent for him by Vithoba himself.

It is difficult to believe the legend but fact is Tukaram died (or vanished) around the year 1650. The circumstances of his death are not known. There are some scholars who believe that Tukaram was killed by jealous Brahmins and his body disposed off without leaving any trace. Whatever the truth, 350 years after his death Tukaram remains a living poet whose songs are still on the lips of millions.

#### Jotiba Phule & Savitribai Phule

Among the pioneers who revolted against social and religious inequities in the early 19th century was Jotiba Govindrao Phule, who came to be known as 'Mahatma' in Maharashtra. The significance of Phule's rebellion lay in the fact that it came not from the Brahminical perspective, but from a radically different world view acquired through self-education and deep thinking. Phule was born in Brahmin

dominated Pune in 1827 in a well-to-do family belonging to the Mali (floriculturist) community. Jotiba did have a brief spell of formal education.

He closely observed the functioning of the Christian missionary institutions and was greatly influenced by the writings of Thomas Paine, his concept of human equality and his spiritual conviction that there was only one God. Paine was closely associated with the two great events of the previous century—the American war of Independence and the French Revolution. Paine made a deep impression on Jotiba and shaped largely the latter's thinking on reforming the society.

Phule plunged into social life when 21 year old by launching the first school for girls open to all castes in Pune in 1848. He naturally encountered stiff resistance from the orthodoxy of the city. Phule rightly judged that male teachers in a girls' school would only sharpen the evil criticism against his venture. And so he decided to employ a woman teacher. His wife Savitribai was an illiterate when she was married. Phule coached her at home and eventually made her the teacher in his girls' school.

**Mud, Cowdung, Stones and Brickbats:** Thus Savitribai was not only the first woman teacher but also most probably the first working woman in Maharashtra. The Brahmins were so enraged at this 'sacrilege' that they slung mud and cowdung at Savitribai and sometimes pelted her with brickbats and stones whenever she left home to go to the school. Savitribai had to carry a clean saree in a cloth bag to change before she began teaching. The elders of the Mali community, aghast at this 'atrocious' behaviour, brought pressure on Jotiba's parents to contain their son. Jotiba and Savitri preferred to leave the parents' home rather than sacrifice their school.

Phule was deeply troubled by the injustice of the caste



system and particularly by the scourge of untouchability. Only a total action-oriented rebellion and not mere education or words would eradicate these two perversities from the Hindu society, he was convinced. Thus despite the resistance, he opened two more schools for girls within four years and also a school for children of all castes, including the so-called untouchables.

Jotirao was moved by the inhuman plight of child widows, majority of them from amongst Brahmin families, who sometimes fell victim to sexual lust of men within the family or outside. A widow in this condition had no escape but to kill herself, abort the fetus, or on secret delivery leave the infant on the street. Phule established in the 1860's an orphanage, gave protection to pregnant widows of all castes and took care of delivery and of the infants. This was the first institution of this kind founded by a Hindu and naturally it caused shock and sensation in the city of Pune. Ironically, among the widows who took shelter in Phule's orphanage, majority were Brahmins. Phule adopted the son of one such Brahmin widow in 1873. In 1868, he opened for all castes, including the untouchables, the bathing water tank near his house.

For livelihood, Phule worked as a building material supplier to the Government. His observation and his own experiences made him realise the inhumanity of the caste system. He was aghast at the exploitation of illiterate workers by Brahmins who dominated key places in lower rungs of the government. During the severe famines in Pune, Ahmednagar and Satara districts, he had organised relief works for the suffering peasants. He was convinced of two things. First, the poor peasants and other deprived sections must become literate and acquire knowledge. And second, the hegemony of Brahmins in all walks of social and cultural life must be broken and the caste system destroyed. He wrote books, plays, dialogues in simple Marathi to

expose the brutality of the caste system and the hypocrisy of the Brahmins.

*The Satyashodhak*: On September 24, 1873, Phule established a movement called *Satyashodhak Samaj* (society of truth seekers). The objective of the *Samaj* was to free the society from clutches of Brahminism and thereby destroy the pernicious caste system. It promoted the view that all men are created equal by God, denied the orthodox Hindu rituals and devised simple ceremonies for birth, wedding and such other occasions performed by any *Satyashodhak* without the services of a Brahmin priest. The movement with its lofty moral ideals and simplicity of philosophical concepts attracted many followers during Phule's life. But within years of his death on November 29, 1890, it took the form of a virulent anti-Brahmin movement and left a deep mark on Maharashtra's social and political life.

The mouthpiece of Phule's movement was a periodical "Deenbandhu" edited by his colleague Krishnarao Bhalekar. Phule wrote prolifically in the paper. Later, the periodical was taken over by Narayan Meghaji Lokhande, another colleague of Phule who had been helping the textile workers of Mumbai to better their living conditions. Phule, along with Lokhande, addressed several meetings of the workers and tried to organise them into an association. This was the first attempt to organise the industrial workers in India. Lokhande is acknowledged as the father of the Indian trade union movement.

Phule was nominated member of the Pune Municipality. The civic body proposed to spend in 1880 one thousand rupees on the visit of Lord Lytton, the Governor General of India, who had enacted laws restricting the freedom of the press. Among the thirty members of the municipality only one, Phule, showed the courage to publicly oppose the proposal and voted against it. His critics

had accused Phule of ingratiating himself with the British rulers. But that was a canard spread to malign him. On many such occasions, Phule proved his integrity and independence and never refrained from ferociously criticising the government whenever an occasion arose.

**Brahminism Attacked:** Several of his books, *Gulamgiri* and *Shetkaryacha Aasood* among them, proved quite controversial at that time because of his scathing attacks on Brahminism. However, as Phule himself made clear several times that he was not against Brahmin individuals but opposed Brahminism. Many of his life-long colleagues who helped him in his endeavour were Brahmins. In fact, it was Phule who took initiative and lead in felicitating Tilak and Agarkar when they were released from jail, almost the first instance of incarceration of journalists and social and political leaders from amongst the Brahmins by the colonial rulers for political reasons.

The contemporary Brahmin elite of Pune, however, either ignored or ridiculed him for the coarseness of his writing, inelegance of his language, and disregard for grammar. But that was a ploy to persuade the society not to take the teachings of Phule seriously. The main grouse of the Brahmins was Phule pioneered a reasoned and comprehensive attack on Brahminism. It took a couple of generations for the Maharashtra elite to appreciate the greatness of his mind and acknowledge the significance of his pioneering contribution.

In his last years, Phule suffered from physical illness as well as financial troubles. Savitribai found it difficult to raise money for her husband's treatment. Undeterred, she worked hard to press further all the activities launched by Phule. Even after Phule's death Savitribai vigorously continued her social activities despite dire poverty. Indeed, the woman of Savitribai's caliber deserves a separate chapter

in the annals of the history of women's liberation in India. This is what a contemporary Brahmin social reformer and scholar, Maharshi Mama Parmananda has to say about Savitribai's critical contribution:

"In completely adverse conditions, Jotiba coached Savitribai and made her a teacher. Savitribai taught even Brahmin girls; that too in the den of the Brahmins (Pune). To establish schools for Mahars and Mangs and strive to end social discrimination against them was simply a revolutionary feat. Savitribai's initiative in this regard was no less important and she deserves compliments for that. One cannot over emphasise her capacity and potential. She fully cooperated in her husband's activities and suffered hardships along with him. It is difficult to find a radical team of husband and wife of such selflessness, dedication and greatness of mind even among the higher castes. The two spent their whole life in the service of the people."

Mama Parmanand appealed to the Maharaja Gaikwad of Baroda to help Savitribai during the last painful months of Jotiba Phule. Gaikwad's help came two years after Phule's death but it did help Savitribai and her adopted son Yashwant to live a very frugal life. Savitribai continued with the activities of the *Satyashodhak* movement and personally worked hard to help people during the outbreak of plague in 1896. Her son Yashwant, trained as a medical doctor, was away for military service. Savitribai called him back to Pune to set up a clinic for the plague affected. So dedicated was she to her work that she moved around fearlessly to help the patients, unmindful of the danger of contagion. Ultimately, she caught the contagion and died on March 10, 1897.

**Motherly Temperament:** Savitribai was born on January 3, 1831, at village Naigaum 50 kms south of Pune. Her father, Khandoji Nevse Patil was a hard-working well-to-do farmer.

She was 9 and Jotiba 13 when they were married in 1840. Illiterate Savitri was given primary lessons at home by Jotiba himself. Later he sent her to Ahmednagar in the school of Ms. Farrar and to the normal school of Ms. Mitchel in Pune to train her as a teacher. She is regarded as the first woman teacher and the first headmistress in a regular school in India. The then Education Secretary to the Government of Bombay Presidency, Lumsden and chairman of the school board Sir Arskin Perry had praised the work of Savitribai as a teacher in their reports. When the couple opened their first school in Pune for all castes, including Mahars, Mangs and Muslims, Savitribai was barely 17 and Jotiba 21. The sneers, trials and tribulations and even physical attacks that Savitribai had to face are described earlier.

Two educational institutions were established by the couple: Native Female Schools, Pune and The Society for Promoting the Education of Mahars, Mangs etc. After initial setbacks caused by the fierce opposition from the orthodoxy including the non-Brahmins and even the family members of Phule, the schools multiplied and Savitribai became the headmistress of one of the schools. The quality of education imparted in these schools was excellent. A contemporary newspaper, *Poona Observer*, remarked in May 1852 that the enrolment of students in Phule's schools was 10 times that of the Government schools, an eloquent testimony to the quality of education.

The inspiration for founding an ashram for Brahmin widows gone astray and thrown out by their families came from Savitribai. Jotirao whole heartedly approved of it. By the time she delivered about 50 babies of widows, Savitribai had acquired excellent skills in obstetrics techniques. The duo set up a hostel for students at home. Savitribai must be a woman of infinite energy with a motherly temperament. She cooked for the inmates and gave them love and affection as a mother to her children. She was a strict disciplinarian

and meticulous about cleanliness and daily schedule. Two collections of her poems were published during her life. She also edited and published selected speeches of Jotiba Phule in 1856. Indeed, the versatility, the abundant humanity and action-oriented progressive liberalism this great woman displayed when the contemporary society was living almost in the middle ages, is amazing and inspiring.

### Dadabhai Naoroji

Better known as the founder member and father figure of the Indian National Congress, Dadabhai Naoroji was the first Indian nationalist who effectively exposed the exploitative nature of the British Empire in India. To Dadabhai goes the distinction of being the first Indian to be elected to the British Parliament. A mathematician and economist by training, Dadabhai wrote a monumental treatise, *Poverty and un-British Rule in India* which created a sensation and forced the colonial government to revise its economic and administrative policies in India. Justice M.G. Ranade, the father of Indian economics, and G.K. Gokhale who later came to be known as the most scholarly critic of the colonial economic policies, had based their expositions on Dadabhai's treatise.

Moderate in temperament and beliefs, Dadabhai was a constitutionalist in politics. He believed in the virtues of western education and helped many a young Indian to go abroad for higher education. A soft spoken man of high character, Dadabhai, however, never minced words while exposing the misdeeds of the colonial government. He began his presidential speech at the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress with the following famous quotation of Sir Henry Campbell Banerman, "Good government cannot be an alternative to the people's government". He was an institution builder and was instrumental in establishing a branch of the Royal Asiatic Society in Bombay. A powerful

orator both in English and Gujarati, Dadabhai was elected president of the National Congress thrice.

Born on September 4, 1825, in a family belonging to the robust and enterprising Parsee community of Bombay, Dadabhai studied in the Elphinstone Institute of Bombay and was appointed in 1850 as the assistant professor of mathematics and philosophy. A Zoroastrian by religion, Dadabhai fully absorbed the cosmopolitan culture of the city and brought it to bear on his social and political activities. From his early days, he was the champion of women's education and actively campaigned for this goal. After a brief stint as a teacher, Dadabhai was offered a high-salaried job by a Parsee company in London. It gave him an opportunity to travel a lot, see the world and observe closely the British society at home. In London, he founded the London India Society along with W.C. Banerjee. Dadabhai quit his lucrative job when he found that his company had started trading in opium. He started his own trading company.

He founded another body of the Indians in Britain, The East India Association, to articulate the problems of India at the door of the British government. Dadabhai's deposition before the Faucet Committee appointed by the government to examine the economic conditions in India was a landmark of his political career. He proved to the committee that colonial India was the highest taxed country in the world and that the annual income of an individual Indian averaged to mere Rs. 20. On return home, he was elected to the Bombay Municipal Corporation in 1875. He was also appointed a member of the provincial legislative council.

Dadabhai played an important role in founding the Indian National Congress when its first session was held in Bombay in 1885. He had the honour of thrice being elected as the President of Congress—1886, 1893 and 1906. As the President of the Calcutta Congress in 1906 Dadabhai

explicitly articulated the demand for *swaraj* and conceived the call for boycott of British goods. The next year the Congress split between moderates and extremists led by Tilak. Moderates under the leadership of Dadabhai retained the control of the Congress organisation. A great social reformer, educationist, and a man of culture and sophistication, Dadabhai Naoroji will forever be remembered as the Grand Old Man of India. He died on June 13, 1917.

### Justice Mahadeo Govind Ranade

The description "maker of modern Maharashtra" could be applied no more aptly than to Justice Mahadeo Govind Ranade. Indeed, like most contemporary thinkers, Ranade contemplated comprehensively on the conditions and problems of the Indian sub-continent as a whole with Maharashtra as only a part of it. He is also justly referred to as the 'father of Indian economics' on account of his pioneering writing of brilliant essays on this theme. An institution builder with a brilliant judicial career, Ranade was the trail blazer among the modern intellectuals and liberal thinkers of India who showed the way to build a modern and progressive Indian nation.

The British united a geographical entity of the Indian sub-continent into an administrative unit. It was Ranade who pioneered the vision of India as a modern nation. He wrote in his essays:

I profess implicit faith in two articles of my creed. This country of ours is the true land of promise. This race of ours is a chosen race. It was not for nothing that God has showered his choicest blessings on this ancient land of *Aryavarta*.

Ranade indeed had faith in India's destiny. Lokmanya Tilak, the fierce critic of Ranade's moderate political views, extolled the former's contribution in glowing terms. "It was

Ranade who breathed life in the body of Maharashtra which was lying dead and cold for sometime" wrote Tilak on Ranade's death in his editorial in *Kesari*. Tilak, Gokhale, Mahatma Gandhi, Agarkar, Dr. Ambedkar... All drew inspiration and strength from Ranade's thoughts and writings. Gokhale learnt the tenets of liberalism at the feet of Ranade. And since Gandhi considered Gokhale as his guru, he referred to Ranade as "My Guru's Guru".

Ranade wrote extensively and profoundly on broader issues concerning the people of colonial India, particularly on economy and history giving a new perspective to Indian thinkers different from the essentially English and Euro-centric view of things which was then the basis of teaching history and economics to Indian students. His books *Essays in Indian Economy* and *Rise of Maratha Power* are standing monuments to his pioneering scholarship and vision in these areas. Ranade was of the firm view that political, social and economic movements in India should go hand in hand.

**The Institution Builder.** Because of this he was a frequent target of young nationalist leaders like Tilak whose uncompromising contention was that the struggle for political freedom should take priority over all other people's movements. Ranade, on the other hand, believed that social and religious reforms were a pre-condition for political emancipation and propagated the view that liberation from ethnic and religious prejudices was the chief mantra of modern liberalism. Indeed, working for social reform was working for liberation, he believed.

Born on 18 January 1842, nearly 24 years after the Peshwa rule came to an end, in a lower middle class family at Niphad in Nasik district, Ranade had most of his schooling in Kolhapur before he was sent to Mumbai's Elphinstone Institute in 1856. He had a brilliant academic career and stood first in the first matriculation examination held in 1859 by

the Bombay University. Similarly, Ranade topped the B.A. and M.A. examinations of the University and won the first Gold Medals in history and economics. His famous book, *Rise of Maratha Power* was based on his own dissertation he wrote for his matriculation.

Ranade worked in the Government as a teacher, oriental translator, administrator in a small princely state of Akkalkot and professor of English and History. He joined the judicial service in 1871 and by 1893 was appointed the judge of the Bombay High Court. The appointment was delayed because the British were not happy with his participation in social and political activities. Even while serving the Government, Ranade never bartered his freedom for personal consideration.

Unmindful of the displeasure of the British masters, Ranade whole heartedly supported and promoted progressive activities of the people in any field. Education, religious and economic studies, trade, commerce and industrial enterprise, literature and culture, social reforms.... there was hardly any public activity or progressive movement in Western India with which Ranade was not associated. He founded the Industrial Association of Western India, was among the promoters of the Industrial Exhibition held in Pune in 1890 and held the first conference of Marathi literature on May 11, 1878.

Ranade was also the main spirit behind the *Granthalaya Parishad*, a congress of libraries. The *Vakrutvottejak Sabha*, an association to promote the art of oratory, was also his brainchild. Most of these institutions including the Marathi literary conference have burgeoned in Maharashtra and have continued their activities till today. His initiative in setting up the *Prarthana Samaj* in Bombay and later the *Sarvajanik Sabha* in Pune and his role in founding the Indian National Congress is already mentioned.

He was instrumental in establishing the Social

Conference in 1888 which was held with annual sessions of the Congress. All through these activities, Ranade actively encouraged social and religious reforms incurring wrath and criticism from the orthodox sections of the society in Pune. If social reforms such as banning child marriages and encouraging widow remarriages could be helped by Government interventions and enactment of laws, so be it even if the rulers were foreigners. That was Ranade's view.

Till the end of his life on January 16, 1901, Ranade held aloft the banner of political liberalism and social and religious reforms. In spite of scorn and abuses hurled at him, he never deflected from his views and went on propagating them quietly. His fierce commitment to the principles he held and the values he cherished, his devotion to liberalism, his temperament of toleration and accommodation, the depth and profoundness of his vision and elegance of his language have made a lasting impact on Maharashtra's and indeed India's social and political ambience.

### **Bal Gangadhar Tilak**

The one leader after Shivaji who acquired undisputed following throughout the length and breadth of Maharashtra was Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Like Shivaji he had his contemporary detractors and critics. But nearly a century after his death, Tilak has grown in stature in the people's mind with his iconic image acquiring a brilliant aura, an image associated with uncompromising ideal of freedom that is indelibly etched in the national consciousness. Tilak made the common man conscious of his slavery and infused in him the urge to fight the alien rule. He was the first to take the freedom movement to the streets and to rouse and mobilise public opinion towards that end. Valentine Chirol, a British journalist, famously described him as "the father of Indian unrest".

Born on July 23, 1856 in Ratnagiri on the Western coast,

a year before the first war of Independence, Tilak was brought up in the traditional time-honoured manner of an orthodox Brahmin household for the first ten years at the end of which his father was transferred to Pune, an accident which facilitated for him the best of education available then. There he matriculated and joined the Deccan College as the resident scholar and took his Bachelor's degree in 1877 with first class in mathematics. Two years later, he took the degree in law.

The few years he spent at the Deccan College were devoted more to contemplation of conditions of the people under the colonial rule than formal study. Among a galaxy of his friends in the college who rose to eminence in later life, the closest was Gopal Ganesh Agarkar. The two of them held long discussions, occasionally running into days and nights on the plight of their countrymen. By the end of their college days, both had come to a firm conclusion that the Indians must establish private schools on the model of missionary institutions to impart national education to the new generations. Both vowed to endeavour toward that end sacrificing their personal careers and to devote entire life to public service. As a matter of fact, the first class degrees they had acquired had opened avenues of high salaried jobs with the government.

**Political incarceration:** In association with Vishnushastri Chiplunkar, whose thick polemical rhetoric had aroused fierce patriotic feelings among the young literates, the duo established the New English School in Pune on January 1, 1880, the pioneering institute whose objective was to impart national education. As the school became a stunning success, Tilak and Agarkar started in January 1881 two weeklies devoted to nationalistic cause, again in association with Chiplunkar. Agarkar was the editor of *Kesari* in Marathi and Tilak of *Mahratta* in English. Like the school, the journals

too became an instant success chiefly owing to their hard-hitting criticism on all sorts of injustices, their professional endeavour to provide news and views in sophisticated cultured language and above all because of the essentially nationalistic character of both the weeklies. *Kesari* gained immense popularity becoming the highest circulated Indian language newspaper soon and the *Mahratta* acquired the reputation as the mouthpiece of educated opinion in Western India.

The two journals exposed a conspiracy against the minor Maharaja of Kolhapur which attracted charges of criminal defamation. The two editors were sentenced to four months' imprisonment in July 1882, the first ever punishment to newspaper editors in Western India. The prison sentence only steeled their resolve to serve their motherland and attracted popular attention on them. That was also Tilak's initiation in the larger political arena. It was Jotiba Phule who organised a huge public procession in Pune to felicitate Tilak and Agarkar when they were freed from the prison.

As the New English School was well set, the trust under the leadership of Tilak and Agarkar expanded the activity by setting up the Fergusson College under the aegis of the Deccan Education Society in January 1885. Needless to say, both Tilak and Agarkar spent considerable time every day in teaching and administration of the institutions. Tilak taught Sanskrit and Mathematics and did not draw any salary from the labour in keeping with the vow of self denial both he and Agarkar had taken. As they had visualised, the institution was to be run on the discipline of a Jesuitical organisation.

Gopal Krishna Gokhale soon joined the members as professor of English literature. The college is now among the premier educational institutions in the country. However, soon differences of opinion grew among the members. Tilak,

a puritan in this regard, was insistent that no member be associated with any other organisation. Gokhale accepted the honorary secretaryship of the *Sarvajanic Sabha* which brought the matters to a head. Tilak resigned in 1890 severing his association with the society. He had given ten best years to education, his life's ideal. He then devoted full attention to the two journals and social activities.

**The great debate:** There also, the two friends, Tilak and Agarkar, started falling apart as the newspapers then were the only vehicle to carry out debates and propagate social reforms. The battle in Maharashtra between social reformers and the orthodoxy was joined and intensified when the two friends were in the Deccan College and most of their debates there were centered on these issues. While Agarkar was a strident champion of quick social reforms with priority, Tilak wanted to go slow on them. The two parted ways and Agarkar set up another journal, *Sudharak*, to propagate his fiery views on the social reform. Tilak took over the editorship of *Kesari*.

As stated earlier, Tilak was neither against essential social reforms nor did he favour the orthodoxy. And yet he spent considerable energy in fighting the social reformers. He did not want the reforms forced down the throat of the society, particularly by an alien ruler. He fought for the regeneration of the Hindu society and yet deeply cherished the Hindu religious tenets, philosophies and moral values. His belief was that social changes should come about gradually through education and not compulsion; that mass education was the best lever for social reforms. He was scornful of the reformers who preached reforms but did not practice them personally.

Widow remarriage was a desirable reform, he said, but most reformers did not practice it in their families, he chided. Advocates of reforms should live up to their preaching, he

held. Each time a social reform issue came to the fore, Tilak attacked the reformers with characteristic zeal. He was against child marriages and yet he vehemently opposed the Age of Consent Bill. He favoured widow remarriages and yet he attacked those who were content merely preaching it. He wanted the scourge of untouchability removed from the Hindu society.

In fact, Tilak had proposed a constructive manifesto of social reforms which would voluntarily bind its supporters. Some of the points of this charter need to be reproduced:

1. Girls should not be married before the age of 16.
2. Boys should not be married before 20.
3. No man should marry after the age of 40.
4. If a man wanted to marry again, he should marry a widow.
5. Use of liquor should be prohibited.
6. Dowry should be abolished.
7. Widows should not be tonsured.
8. Those accepting these reforms should contribute one-tenth of their income to the reform movement.

Ironically, few reformers came forward to support the manifesto. Thus on many occasions Tilak was forced to attack hammer and tongs reputed social reformers like Justice Ranade, Dr. Bhandarkar, Agarkar, Gokhale, Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur and others. His vehement criticism of the arm-chair social reformers and his opposition to hold the Social Conference (of reformers) in the pandal of the National Congress in Pune in 1895 made his contemporary adversaries stamp him as a bigot and a reactionary which, according to his biographer N.G. Jog, was unfair and contrary to facts.

Consequently, Tilak had to spend considerable energy in fighting what he described as impractical zeal of the reformers. His reasonable views on the key issues of social reforms were lost in the dust of fierce controversies Tilak

himself raised. Although he did propose a constructive charter of reforms, he did not push it with vigor as he had made it amply clear that political struggle for freedom was his first priority.

Tilak's penchant for vigorously pursuing the political movement while debunking the 'foreigner-grafted' social reforms endeared him to the masses. The resignation from the college left Tilak, a man of abundant energy and prodigal capacity to work, free to pursue his social activities and devote more attention to his journals. During the next few years, Tilak launched two national festivals and made them popular, worked hard for the peasants struck by severe famine, became a member of the Pune Municipal Committee, fellow of the Bombay University Senate and a member of the Bombay Legislative Council. He captured the *Sarvajanik Sabha* from the moderates and organised volunteers to help victims when plague afflicted Pune. In between he was involved in several legal disputes as the editor and a public person.

**Tilak the Scholar:** All this hectic activity did not deter him from writing a scholarly work 'Orion', an original study of Vedic Calendar which attracted attention of scholars and Indologists worldwide, including Prof. Max Muller. He also began taking keen interest in the activities of the National Congress. His close ideological association with two other young Congress leaders, Bipin Chandra Pal and Lala Lajpatrai, formed the famous trio-Lal-Bal-Pal—representing the three corners of India and signifying emergence of a national leadership. He began attending the Congress sessions from 1889 and soon captured the imagination of its young members. Tilak spent rest of the years of his life in making the Congress a people-oriented movement with a radical hue.

Tilak's objectives in converting the Ganapati puja and



Shivaji's birth anniversary in public festivals have been discussed earlier. For him, these were immensely useful and popular means for social consolidation and political awakening of the masses. The Ganapati festival continues to be widely observed in Maharashtra with great fanfare although its socio-political content is completely lost. His initiative in reviving annual Shivaji festival also evoked a popular response throughout Maharashtra. Both festivals strengthened the appeal of Tilak's struggle for *swaraj*.

Tilak's trenchant criticism of the government's mishandling of famine and police atrocities while dealing with the epidemic of plague was frowned upon by the authorities. Two angry young Brahmins of Pune murdered the officers responsible for the plague atrocities when the latter were returning from a dinner at the Governor's House in celebration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. The police let loose a reign of terror to arrest the perpetrators of the crime. Tilak's writings in *Kesari* grew even harsher holding the government responsible for the charged atmosphere. There were attempts to implicate him in the murder.

**Sedition:** Frustrated, the government arrested him on charges of sedition in July 1897 and quickly put him on trial. A jury of six Europeans and three Indians held Tilak guilty of the charges and Justice Strachey sent him to eighteen months' of rigorous imprisonment. The trial in Bombay High Court has a place in history because of widespread popular attention it received in the country and also because of Tilak's inspired defence in the court. When the sentence was announced, Tilak declared in the court, "...in spite of the verdict of jury, I maintain that I am innocent. There are higher powers that rule the destiny of men and nations and it may be the will of the providence that the cause I represent may prosper more by my suffering than by my remaining free."

The news of Tilak's conviction was received with shock and dismay. The conviction also confirmed his stature as the national leader. Eleven years later, Tilak was again found guilty on similar charges and was deported to Andamans to serve a rigorous imprisonment for six years. That time, Bombay's textile workers spontaneously struck work for six days. Meanwhile, his attempts to forge a compromise and unity among the moderates and the radicals in the National Congress had failed and the Congress split in its Surat session in December 1907. On return from Andamans, Tilak devoted his energies to the Home Rule movement till he breathed last on August 1, 1920 following fatigue and illness. The Home Rule League was established before the Lucknow Congress of 1916 where the Congress and the Muslim League signed a pact. In Lucknow, the three major streams of the then Indian politics—the moderates, the radicals and the Muslims—had come together.

Throughout his adult life, Tilak was preoccupied with the thought of attaining freedom for the country and awakening the masses for a political struggle. He thought constantly about how to make that struggle more effective. He is considered a pioneer of promoting *swadeshi* movement and boycott of foreign goods as weapons to fight the British with. He used only *swadeshi* goods for personal and household needs. His journals used only *swadeshi* newsprint and when that was not available, any paper not produced by the British mills. He helped young men to start cottage industries and established what was called 'paisa fund' to help promote indigenous industries.

**Giant among Men:** Tilak had begun to think of a passive resistance movement from the Delhi Congress and enunciated his ideas clearly in his Calcutta Congress speech in 1906. Said Tilak,

If you have not the power of active resistance, have you

not the power of self-denial and self-abstinence so as not to assist the foreign government to rule over you? This is boycott and this is what is meant when we say boycott is a political weapon. We shall not assist them to collect revenue and keep peace. We shall not assist them in fighting beyond the frontiers or outside India with Indian blood and money. We shall not assist them in carrying on the administration of justice. We shall have our own courts and when the time comes we shall not pay taxes. Can you do that by your efforts? If you can you are free from tomorrow.

Time was not ripe. It took Gandhi another decade and half to employ the tool of non-cooperation and launch the world's most celebrated passive resistance movement for political freedom. In this respect, many consider Gandhi a continuation of the freedom struggle fashioned by Tilak. Gandhi was a disciple of soft-speaking liberal and moderate Gokhale. But in thoughts and deeds he was more radical than Tilak.

Tilak suffered three terms in rigorous imprisonment and made going to jail a matter of honour for freedom fighters. The terms were harsh and each time Tilak returned an emaciated man, the hard life behind the bars, the solitary confinement, particularly the term in Andamans telling on his health. But each time on release, he turned to work with energy and determination. In the prison, he wrote three scholarly books which enhanced his reputation as an Indologist and a patriot of high caliber who saw in the *Bhagwad Gita* Lord Krishna's positive message to work selflessly for your goals without expecting fruits of labour. His *Geeta-Rahasya*, the monumental treatise on *Gita*, written while serving prison term in Andamans is considered an original commentary on the holy book promoting a positive view of life rather than renunciation. Tilak's two other books, *Orion* and *Arctic Home in the Vedas*, also written in prison

are acknowledged as pioneering work in Indology.

When Tilak died in Bombay, the city almost came to a standstill. Millions poured out to join the funeral procession, largest the city had seen. He was cremated on the sands of Bombay's *Chowpatty*. Whole of Maharashtra went into mourning. Said Gandhi of him:

...No man of our times had the hold on the masses that he had. The devotion he commanded from thousands of his countrymen was extraordinary. He was unquestionably the idol of the people. His word was law among thousands. A giant among men has fallen. The voice of lion is hushed. What was the reason of his hold on his countrymen? I think the answer is simple. His patriotism was passion with him. He knew no religion but love of his country. He was a born democrat.

### Gopal Krishna Gokhale

Gokhale has a pre-eminent position among those early leaders who have left a lasting impact on the liberal thought on the Indian polity. In a short span of 49 years of his life, Gokhale set the example of purity and sincerity of purpose and action, moral rectitude, moderation, cultured criticism and a deeply liberal humanistic outlook in public life. His sacrifices, fearlessness, scholarship and oratory had made him a role model in his lifetime. Mohammed Ali Jinnah, during his early career as a Congressman had publicly expressed his desire to become a "Muslim Gokhale". Gandhi acknowledged him as his Guru in public life. It is significant that both Gandhi and Jinnah drew inspiration from Gokhale. He was considered the leader of the moderates in the Congress organisation.

Gokhale's brilliance and sweep of his personality could be judged from a simple chronology of his life. He became a professor at the age of 20. At 22, he was made the associate editor of Agarkar's periodical 'Sudharak' for a short while; secretary of the *Sarvajanik Sabha* at 23, secretary of the

Bombay Provincial Council at 24, secretary of the Deccan Education Society at 25, secretary of the Indian National Congress at 29, was invited to depose before the Welby Commission in London at 30, appointed member of the Bombay Legislative Council at 34 and of the Imperial Legislative Council at 36. He founded Pune's famous Servants of India Society when he was just 39. At the age of 40 he was the President of the Indian National Congress and visited England several times as the member of the Royal Commission.

Born on May 9, 1866 in a remote village Kotluk of Ratnagiri district of coastal Konkan in a very poor Brahmin family, Gopal could avail of education only because of the sacrifices made by his uncle. His aunt pawned whatever jewellery she had for the purpose. He was sent to Kolhapur for secondary education. There and later in Pune he lived in utter poverty till he acquired a teacher's job in the New English School. From there he went on to become the Professor of mathematics in the Fergusson College and life member of the Deccan Education Society from where he resigned in 1902 to enter public life.

**Gokhale and Tilak:** Gokhale and Tilak began their public life almost simultaneously but parted ways when the differences in their approach towards various issues including the political struggle became apparent. Tilak turned to radical politics while Gokhale remained a moderate till the end. He believed in political reforms by constitutional means advocating educational advancement and arousing people's awareness for that end. He was noticed at the national level and was showered with accolades on his deposition before the Welby Commission. His persuasive arguments based on facts regarding the rising burden of taxes imposed by the colonial rule on the people were well received both by the rulers and the Indian elite of the time.

His speeches in the Central Legislative Council on the annual budget of the Government were considered a model of studied criticism of the Government. His profound analysis in these speeches of India's political, economic and educational problems later became a source of inspiration for the liberals and radicals alike to base their arguments in support of their political struggle. The gamut of his speeches was comprehensive touching every aspect of life in the country including Indian agriculture, problems of the peasants, import and exports of goods, taxation systems, industrial growth, rupee-pound relationship and expenses on the armed forces.

Though the contents of his speeches were hard-hitting, Gokhale never raised his voice nor used harsh words. He believed in persuasive arguments in a soft and cultured language to press his point home. In the legislative houses he was heard with respect, admiration and awe both by the treasury benches and others. Persuasive oratory was his forte. He founded the Servants of India Society with the specific intention of molding young, selfless social workers equipped with knowledge and education to build a modern Indian society. He is also known for championship of women's education, eradication of the caste system and untouchability through his writings and speeches.

A soft-spoken man, Gokhale was known for mathematical brilliance, flawless and transparent personal character, and selflessness, a well organised mind that shaped his comprehensive approach to any issue or subject under scrutiny, his meticulousness and scholarship and his excellent command over English language evoking admiration, awe and jealousy among the high ranking British officers. His early death on February 19, 1915, was mourned even by his political adversaries and created a vacuum in the liberal school of thought within the Indian

National Congress. Gokhale was a great admirer of Dadabhai Naoroji and claimed to follow the latter's liberal tradition. It was Gokhale who advised Gandhi, then just returned from South Africa, to see and observe the country first hand before plunging into politics.

### **Vinayak Damodar Sawarkar**

Sawarkar dreamt of an armed revolution as a means to achieve freedom and inspired many a radical group of youths in India. Vinayak Sawarkar, his elder brother Ganesh and younger one Narayan were all drawn into the movement. Sawarkar set up a secret group 'Abhinav Bharat' at Nasik in 1904 whose objective was to mobilise and organise people for an armed rebellion. Its branches soon mushroomed in Pune, Mumbai, Satara, Ahmednagar, Kolhapur, Sholapur, Dhule, Nagpur, Amravati, Indore and Gwalior. Already, there were independent groups and 'Akhadas' which secretly trained young men in the use of arms. They drew inspiration from the heroes of the 1857 insurgency, which Sawarkar described as the first armed struggle for India's independence. Shivaji, Napoleon and Mazini were also their heroes. Partition of Bengal in 1905 evoked nationwide protests and drove radical youths in hordes to the idea of armed revolution.

Sawarkar went to England to study law but spent more time in organising the like-minded Indian youths there, collecting funds for procuring fire arms and sending these clandestinely to his groups in India. He established links with revolution groups in France and Russia. He translated Joseph Mazini's autobiography in Marathi and sent it secretly to India. It became almost the Bible of the revolutionary groups. The other book he wrote in England which invited the wrath of the Government was 'War of Liberation of 1857'. The book was banned but its copies did reach India and were lapped by eager young men. He

inspired and attracted many radical groups in India not merely because of his radical appeal for armed rebellion but also on account of his mesmerising oratory, his poetry, his powerful writing against flimsy superstition, religious beliefs and rituals and his fervent promotion of scientific and rational temperament. Expectedly, Sawarkar was arrested on charges of sedition and deported to India. On way home, he jumped from the ship when it anchored at Marseilles and swam ashore to escape from the British clutches but was nabbed by a French soldier at the port.

A special judge in Bombay in 1911 sentenced Sawarkar to two life terms of rigorous imprisonment—50 years—and sent to notorious Cellular Jail of Andaman island. Later, Sawarkar was released in 1924 with severe restrictions. In Ratnagiri, he devoted his energies to social reforms and eradication of the caste system. He joined the Hindu Maha Sabha in later years and espoused the cause of *Hindutva*. But being a rationalist, his idea of *Hindutva* was quite different from the kind of *Hindutva* the R.S.S. propagated. Sawarkar and the R.S.S. could not see eye to eye.

Although his political views were controversial, his place in the history of India's freedom struggle is unassailable. People of all political hues have a high regard for him as a dedicated patriot and revolutionary of high caliber prepared to lay down his life for the cause of the nation. Indeed. All the three Sawarkar brothers and their families suffered heavily in this cause. Swatantrya Veer Sawarkar, as he is known in Maharashtra, will also be remembered as a radical thinker of scientific and rational temperament, a poet par excellence, a writer of magnificent Marathi, reformer of the language and a firebrand orator who could mesmerise the masses. Sadly, most organisations competing for political power in the name of the Hindu masses, have given a short shrift to Sawarkar's radical views on Hindu reforms and his rationalist, scientific outlook.

Among other legendary radical revolutionaries was Pandurang Mahadeo Bapat, better known as Senapati Bapat who eventually took to Gandhism. Sawarkar's 'Abhinav Bharat' had inspired many young men to take to arms. Clubs, groups, traditional vyayam shalas, akhadas turned fiercely nationalistic and had begun training the youth in use of arms. There were sporadic incidents of violence. But these groups were not adequately networked. Nor had they the idea of the strength of the British. After Sawarkar's long imprisonment, many of these groups went underground and their activities slowed down.

### Vinoba Bhave

Father of the *Bhoodan* Movement, Gandhian sage, freedom fighter and scholar Vinayak Narhari alias Vinoba Bhave spent his life like a modern *rishi* preaching the gospel of non-violence, self-help and social self-sufficiency. His concept of *Bhoodan* envisaged that equality of all men could be established simply by appealing to their conscience and their implicit sense of responsibility towards well-being of the society. He went about on foot all over India to prove it by asking big land-holders to 'donate' their excess land for the landless. Though the world looked at his maverick experiment with wonder and skepticism, Vinoba in true Gandhian style walked about 70,000 kilometres between March 1951 and 1965 through most of the states of India creating a stir in the world. On the way, hundreds and thousands of land-holders donated their excess land to the movement most of which Vinoba distributed among the poor landless villages.

The exact outcome of the unusual experiment has never been thoroughly analyzed but during his marathon march, Vinoba attracted attention of scholars, sociologists and statesmen the world over and hundreds of youths dedicated months and years to follow in the hurricane pilgrimage in

search of equality, peace and purity of human conscience. The experiment by all accounts may have been doomed to a failure for the simple reason that man, the greedy animal that he is, parts but rarely with his assets for an abstract welfare cause without coercion. However, Vinoba with his deep faith in the essential goodness of human nature and commitment to Gandhian way of life was not naïve to expect outstanding results. He believed the experiment as a means to arouse the egalitarian conscience of the people. His sermons on the way on non-violence, human brotherhood, peace and self-help in fluent local languages (he could speak most of the Indian languages fluently), his ascetic bearing evoking reverence among the common folk won millions of Indian hearts.

Associated with the *Bhoodan* activity, was another concept of Vinoba, *Sarvodaya*, which he popularised with the slogans such as *Jay Jagat* and *Sab Bhoomee Gopal Ki*. *Sarvodaya* means "emancipation of all". It is this mission which saw Indian landscape being dotted with hundreds of *Sarvodaya* ashrams spreading the preachings of Vinoba and Gandhi. The inspiration of the *Bhoodan* concept was the Communist movement in Telangana where the conflict basically was between the big landlords and the landless poor. A true practitioner of non-violence, Vinoba set out on March 7, 1951 on foot from Paunar in Wardha district to Pochampalli in Andhra Pradesh on a peace mission. There on April 18th, he announced the beginning of his *Bhoodan* programme asserting that equitable distribution of land by peacefully arousing the conscience of the landholders would alone ensure a true social revolution which he promised would lead to *Gram-Swarajya* meaning sovereignty of the village, another of his pet concepts.

Vinoba was born in Gagode village of Raigad district on September 11, 1895 to poor Brahmin parents who migrated to Baroda for livelihood. Vinoba, a brilliant student,

his genius manifesting in many directions, after completing his secondary school and intermediate was on way to Mumbai to pursue higher education when in a sudden feat he changed the course and went to Benaras to listen to Mahatma Gandhi's speech. It made a deep impression on him. Soon, he joined the Mahatma's Kocharab ashram and took a vow of celibacy to dedicate life to the nation. With the permission of Gandhi, Vinoba joined in 1916 the *Pradnya Pathashala* of Wai, an ancient place of Sanskrit learning in Maharashtra to study *Vedas* and *Upanishadas* for a year. On Gandhi's advice, he spent most of his life probing himself in the field to test the practicality his ideas of self-help and *Gram-Swarajya*. In between he participated in the non-cooperation movements of 1930 and 1932 and served prison terms. In the individual *satyagraha* movement of 1940, Gandhi chose Vinoba as the first *satyagrahi*. Gandhi's second choice was Jawaharlal Nehru.

Despite his deep spiritual disposition, his concepts of self-help and his insistence on minimising man's needs in life to attain happiness, Vinoba was a man of scientific temperament not given to ritualistic religion and superstitions. His thousands of discourses in various languages on *Gita*, *Veda*, *Upanishadas*, *Kuran*, *Gram Swarajya* etc. are replete with rich references to scientific ideas and technological developments. He believed that science and technology were neutral phenomena which could be put to positive advantage through man's spiritual upliftment.

In November 1982, when Vinoba realised that his body was no longer willing to serve the soul, he renounced food and water and all medical treatment (*prayopaveshan*, a method of renouncing life approved in Hindu, Buddhist and Jain religions) and like a true *tapasvi* breathed his last on November 15, 1982.

### Dadasaheb Phalke

Dadasaheb Phalke's place is assured in India's history for his pioneering contribution to the Indian film industry and profession. Indeed, Phalke is aptly described by film historians as the father of the Indian cinema. On May 3, 1913, he screened in Bombay's Coronation Theatre 'Raja Harishchandra', the first film based on an essentially Indian story entirely made by an Indian in India. This event heralded the celluloid era in the Indian sub-continent, the beginning of the now multi-billion rupees film industry of India which is only second to Hollywood. The film was made by Phalke in his makeshift studio and laboratory in Mumbai. Behind this venture went the innovative genius of Phalke, his unflinching determination, perseverance and great deal of personal sacrifices.

Born on April 30, 1870, at Tryambak, a holy place of pilgrimage near Nasik in a middle class family, Dhundiraj Govind alias Dadasaheb Phalke learnt painting at Bombay's J.J. School of Art and later took to sculpture and architecture. He learnt a little bit of magic too which he put to good use later while shooting trick scenes. His passion, however, was photography. He set up as a photographer and engraver in Mumbai and went to Germany to acquire latest photographic and processing equipment in 1909. In the Christmas of 1910 Phalke saw his first movie film, 'Life of Christ' in a Mumbai theatre. Deeply impressed by the life-like appearance of Jesus Christ on the screen, Phalke was beaten by the film bug and vowed to make a movie himself. Why can't we have an Indian film? Like Christ, can't we show a living Ram or Krishna on the screen? Inspired by Tilak's promotion of 'Swadeshi' movement, Phalke wanted to make a 'swadeshi' movie.

The obsession drove Phalke in a mad pursuit of acquiring the art, techniques and other crafts of film-making. This needed funds. To demonstrate that a movie can be made



by an Indian, Phalke made an experimental film titled 'From peanut to plant' shot frame by frame at short intervals on a simple still camera showing a plant springing out of the soil. It took perseverance and hard labour working day and night without pause. The result was so dramatic that a friend loaned him some money to go to England to purchase a movie camera and other equipment.

On return home, Phalke's wife pawned her jewellery to make the film 'Raja Harishchandra'. The entire Phalke family now shared his obsession. Phalke wrote the script, collected the artistes, prepared the sets and puranic costumes with the help of the family and began shooting in December 1912. Shooting by the day, Phalke washed the film in his make-shift laboratory at night, printed each frame and mounted the reel on the projector to check. Everything was done by hand. It took few months to complete the 3700-feet long film of 40-minutes' duration.

An overwhelming response from the audience to 'Raja Harishchandra' inspired Phalke to make more films—'Mohini-Bhasmasoor' and 'Satyavan-Savitri', both on mythological stories known all over the India. The silent films were a great success and elicited rapturous notices in England, France and Germany. The European directors and technicians were particularly impressed by the trick scenes in these films. A studio in England offered Phalke a job as director at fancy salaries. Phalke rejected the offers and returned home to make more films.

During the turbulent times of the World War II, Phalke made several short films on themes such as tourist places, centers of pilgrimage, Indian religious festivals, cartoons and also educational documentaries. And thus, to Phalke also goes the credit of being the first Indian maker of documentaries. Later he produced about 100 feature films between 1918 and 1935 which were screened all over India. Many young men drew inspiration from

Phalke's first few silent movies and began following the trail.

### Shahu Maharaj

Modern Maharashtra's history will be incomplete without assessing the role of a progressive Prince, Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur, who worked tirelessly to reduce the cruelty of the caste system and make the peasants aware of their role in the new world. Shahu is also considered to be the founder of the non-Brahmin movement along with Mahatma Jotiba Phule. The movement has had considerable impact on Maharashtra's social and political make up. The radicalism that Shahu displayed in his governance and social actions was amazing for a ruler of his background.

The Kolhapur house was set up by Tarabai, wife of Prince Rajaram and daughter in law of the great Shivaji when she fell out with Shahu, the son of Sambhaji. Shahu, the subject of this article, was the adopted son of the sixth inheritor of the Kolhapur *gadi*. Born on July 1874 to Jaisinghrao Ghatge, the regent of the British Government to the Kolhapur state, Shahu was adopted by the widow of Shivaji IV, Anandibai, in 1884. He was sent for education at the Princes College of Rajkot for three years and later was coached at home by Stuart Mitford Frazer for another three years. The maturity of Shahu as a ruler, his world view, his liberal social disposition and his resentment against the injustices of the caste system owe much to the influence of this English teacher with whom the prince retained warm relations till the end of his life. He was coronated on April 3, 1894.

The social reform movement in Maharashtra was at low ebb when Shahu was enthroned. Jotiba Phule had died four years before. The non-Brahmin leaders were withdrawing from politics. They tried to make their voices heard on behalf of the peasants at the Pune session of the

Congress in 1895. But there was no leader of the caliber who could make an impact. As a Maratha ruling prince, Shahu found himself a symbolic rallying point both for the peasants as well as the Maratha aristocratic class throughout Maharashtra. But it goes to the credit of Shahu that long after his death, he was acknowledged not as the leader of princes, sardars and jamindars but the savior of the peasants and the poor. During the distress of famine or the scourge of plague Shahu dispensed with his retinue to personally tour the remote affected areas on foot, on bullock carts and sometime on the back of a camel to provide relief. His outgoing temperament enabled him to establish an immediate rapport with the common peasants with whom he shared food and stories in their dialect. The commoners began extolling him as the 'king of the poor'.

In his youth, Shahu believed in God and religion and meticulously performed the traditional rituals. During the auspicious months of Hindu calendar, he bathed in the river Panchaganga amid the chanting of mantras. Shahu soon discovered to his horror that the Brahmin priest, unbathed and therefore impure recited not the mantras from the hallowed *Vedas* deserved by a *kshatriya* king but some inconsequential stanzas from ordinary *purana*. On questioning, the priest replied, "You are a *shudra* and do not deserve *Veda mantras*. *Purana mantras* would do. And since I am attending a *shudra* host, I need not be bathed." On further questioning, the priest said that until Brahmin councils did not acknowledge Shahu as a *Kshatriya*, he would be treated as a *shudra*.

The incident exploded in a controversy when later Shahu organised Veda and Sanskrit coaching for non-Brahmins including the so-called untouchable Mahars and appointed some of them as priests. Shahu rose in rebellion against the entire chaturvarnya system and led a relentless struggle against dominance of Brahminism. Lokmanya Tilak,

careful about not hurting the religious sentiments of his constituency, sided with the orthodox Brahmins and criticised Shahu harshly. Many contemporary liberal Brahmins believe that if Tilak had resisted the pressure of the orthodoxy and supported Shahu, Maharashtra's social and political life would have dramatically changed.

Shahu then reserved 50 per cent of the jobs in his government for the backward castes. To make a point against untouchability, he deliberately appointed untouchables in his personal service such as mahout, coachman, driver, cleaner, messengers. He issued ordinances banning untouchability in all walks of life. Government offices, schools, hospitals, watering places including wells and tanks were thrown open to all. Any discrimination on the basis of caste in all state institutions would be treated as crime. Shahu abolished many traditional *vatan*s monopolised by the higher castes. The *Mahar vatan* too was abolished. As an example, Shahu encouraged and helped an untouchable to establish a restaurant in Kolhapur and personally visited the hotel along with his large retinue of high class blue blooded sardars—some of them unwilling—to partake of the refreshments served there. The reforms were so comprehensive and far reaching that even many of the Marathas, admirers of Shahu, were not very happy with so radical a change.

Shahu made primary education compulsory and free and set up several educational institutions and hostels for students belonging to the 'untouchable' communities as well as other backward castes. His insistence, of course, was on common education and intermingling of castes and classes in schools. Shahu was an admirer of a brilliant Mahar youth whom he gave a scholarship to study abroad and to set up a periodical in Marathi. The youth was Bhimrao Ambedkar. Shahu personally encouraged inter-caste marriages. To give a blow to the orthodoxy, he appointed a Maratha as the

'Kshatra-Jagadguru', head of a religious institution with a long tradition. He established Shivaji Kshatriya Vaidic School for training non-Brahmins and 'untouchables' in Vedas and related shastras. When no untouchables from Maharashtra were forthcoming to join the school, he went all the way to Delhi to recruit 'untouchable' students with the help of the Arya Samaj. He announced several concessions for girls and women in education.

From socio-political movements and religious reforms to agriculture, education and culture—there was no field that Shahu's progressive rule left untouched. He actively encouraged modern experiments in agriculture, held several agricultural exhibitions in the state to educate peasants and promoted new dams and reservoirs to spread irrigation. He also encouraged entrepreneurs to set up spinning and weaving mills. His generous patronage of legendary musical geniuses, such as Balgandharva, Alladiyakhan, Govindrao Tembe, Kesarbai Kerkar, Anjanibai Malpekar, artistes, painters, sculptors, athletes and wrestlers is well recorded in history. If Kolhapur is on the forefront of the socio-cultural and economic development in the state with its rural areas boasting the highest purchasing power, the visionary efforts of Shahu Maharaj were no less responsible. He freed the peasants from the shackles of traditional restrictive thinking, created a new awareness of their power and encouraged among them a bold spirit of enterprise. Shahu Maharaj died of a heart attack in Mumbai on May 6, 1922.

### **Keshav Baliram Hedgewar**

The *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*, better known as RSS, founded by Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, is by far the most important non-political organisation in India which has, ironically, influenced the politics of the sub-continent to a great extent. RSS, the protagonist of the Hindu power became a kingpin and a source of power in politics from

mid nineties'. Despite its proclaimed apolitical character, it has actively supported the erstwhile Jana Sangh and later the Bharatiya Janata Party in its organisational, political and electoral activities. With its large network of a totally committed and disciplined cadre spread all over India, the RSS helped put the BJP in power at the centre and several other states.

Born on April 1, 1889, in Nagpur in a poor Brahmin family, Hedgewar was orphaned in early infancy and was looked after by his paternal uncle and his wife. Uncle Hedgewar was a nationalist and Keshav picked up this passion from early on. When a British education inspector visited his school, he was greeted in each class with the slogan of *Vande Mataram* by the children. That was Keshav's first organisational coupe. The school was shut. It was reopened only after each student had submitted a written apology. There was only one exception: Keshav Hedgewar. He went to Yavatmal to study in a nationalist school earning his living with his own labour. Later, he went to Calcutta to study medicine where he established contacts with the radical groups of Bengal.

Having earned a degree in medicine, Hedgewar returned to Nagpur. Instead of launching a lucrative career of a medical practitioner, Hedgewar, along with a group of friends, which included Parses as well as Muslims, took a vow to serve the mother land. He participated in Mahatma Gandhi's non-cooperation movement, was made the chief of the volunteer corps at the Nagpur session of the Congress in 1920 and later in 1923 the organisational secretary of the Provincial Congress. It was here that Hedgewar felt the need for building up a well-knit organisation of disciplined and able-bodied youths who would devote their life to the nation. Dr. Hedgewar himself had vowed to remain bachelor and had shunned all family ties.

While devoting full energies to the national movement

of the Congress, Hedgewar was disturbed by the communal atmosphere and occasional eruption of violence. Sawarkar's fierce Hindu nationalism moved him deeply and soon he decided that the Hindu youth must organise to defend their faith. On the *Vijayadashami* day of 1925, he gathered about a dozen teenagers and launched the RSS, an humble beginning of the outfit which was to become so widespread and powerful in a few decades. To begin with, Hedgewar could conduct the non-descript RSS activity as a Congressman and he made even Gandhi to visit one of its *shakhas*. But soon the activity was found incompatible with Congress ideology and Hedgewar charted an independent course.

Everything that the RSS is known for—the discipline, the obedience of its *swayamsevaks*, hierarchy of authority, the daily *shakhas*, periodical training of its *pracharaks* (canvassers), the songs, the syllabus, the uniform—was designed by Hedgewar. He worked tirelessly to spread the network till he died in 1940. His framed photograph adorns the walls in millions of homes across India.

#### **Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar**

After Lokmanya Tilak, the one leader from Maharashtra who walked tall on the national stage and left a lasting imprint on the polity and social chemistry of India is Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. Himself a 'Mahar', the untouchable caste in this part of the country, Dr. Ambedkar devoted his life to the abolition of caste system, to removing the stigma of 'untouchability' from the society and to infusing a powerful breath of self-respect and self-help in the so-called untouchable castes of the country. As a scholar, Dr. Ambedkar went to the roots of caste problem and the *chaturvarnya* system in India and made an original sociological contribution in analysing the mind-boggling phenomenon.

Ambedkar did not believe that even well-meaning progressive caste Hindus such as Mahatma Gandhi had the

capacity to apply rational thinking to the problem of untouchability, let alone remove the scourge. Politicisation and organisation of the untouchables and their own political struggle to fight for socio-political and economic equality as a matter of right was the only way to tackle the problem, he believed. He worked relentlessly to attain this goal. History will acknowledge that Dr. Ambedkar single handedly lifted the dalits of the country from the morass of poverty, injustice, social rejection, inferiority complex, helplessness and ignorance and gave them, dignity, self-respect as well as the will to fight for their own human rights.

The helplessness of Ambedkar's predecessors who strived to attack untouchability had stemmed from the assumption that the untouchable castes were an integral part of the Hindu religion. Ambedkar's willingness to depart from this premise showed him the way. To begin with, he made assiduous attempts to ameliorate the plight of the untouchables from within the steel frame of the Hindu social structure; he attacked the caste system, struggled to open the temples and water resources for the dalits, tried to banish the concept of 'pollution' by touch, experimented with political and social movements only to demonstrate that the problem had no solution within the fold. Finally he, along with millions of his followers, renounced Hinduism and embraced Buddhism; the only religion, as he believed, that was rational and compatible with modern science, a religion that would regulate the moral and ethical conduct of the man in the world of science. So fierce a nationalist and a committed patriot Ambedkar was that even while discarding the ancient religion of his forefathers, Ambedkar ensured that the epochal event would not cause a tectonic social upheaval leading to violent strife in the society.

The main thrust of Dr. Ambedkar's message was that educational and political empowerment of dalits coupled with organisational strength would alone bring them the

cherished freedom and dignity. A legitimate share for the dalits in political power of the day was all that he wanted. All other movements he launched served this purpose. His demand for separate electorates for the scheduled castes was meant to stress his argument that in political terms, dalits be treated as a minority community and not an integral part of the Hindu community. Ultimately, in the interests of social peace and the national freedom struggle, Ambedkar was forced to compromise. His epic struggle with Gandhi on this issue, is well chronicled in history.

And finally, his prodigal contribution in drafting the constitution of India as chairman of the drafting committee is acknowledged by the whole nation. When Jawaharlal Nehru wanted to reform the Hindu personal laws (the entire package termed as the 'Hindu Code Bill') as a first step towards forging a common civil code for all the citizens of the country, he found a kindred soul in Ambedkar, the then law minister in the national cabinet. Nehru entrusted to him the task of drafting and piloting the bill in Parliament. However, Nehru was forced to postpone the bill following violent protests from Hindu orthodox sections from within the Congress and without. That was the last battle of Ambedkar as the reformer of Hindu religion. Disgusted, Ambedkar resigned from the cabinet and embraced Buddha.

It must be emphasised that for Ambedkar, the *Dhamma* of Buddha was not just a personal solution or a gate-away for the dalits from the suffocating caste oppression of the Hindus. It was much more than that. It was for him a religion of the future world, a modern spiritual philosophy acceptable to the human society as a whole. His interpretation of Buddha's life and teaching in his seminal work *Buddha and His Dhamma* is geared to this view. He considered Buddha a rational preacher who believed that the solution to man's problems had to be found in this life alone and that there was no life after death. The poor had nothing to

lose but their grief and poverty, Ambedkar summed up Buddha's teachings in a language reminiscent of Marx's manifesto. However, he was an inveterate critic of the communists and the communist methods. When the religion withered away in the ultimate stage of socialism, as Marx envisaged, what mechanism would be there to regulate the society's moral and ethical conduct, Ambedkar asked. His answer was Buddha and his *Dhamma*.

Ambedkar was born on April 14, 1891, at Mhow near Indore in a Mahar family whose four generations had served in the British army. Ambedkar's father had attained the non-commissioned rank of a Subhedar Major. Mahar families who had served in the army had experienced more interaction with the British, had seen the cosmopolitan world around and were more literate, modern in outlook and progressive by temperament as compared to other communities. Although, Ambedkar's family was well off considering the all round poverty of the community, he was not spared from the social atrocities that a Mahar had to face. With his father's encouragement, Ambedkar went in for higher education. After matriculation, he went to the United States on a scholarship offered by the Maharaja Gaikwad of Baroda and studied Economics, Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology and Ethics in Columbia University. He also earned a doctorate in Economics. The American Declaration of Independence deeply impressed him.

On return to India, Ambedkar had to undergo all the weird and humiliating experiences that are part of an untouchable's everyday life. Since Gaikwad of Baroda had given him a scholarship, he was obliged to work in Baroda administration. Being an untouchable, Ambedkar could not find a house in Baroda. His high caste juniors in the office would avoid physical touch and prohibited him to drink water from the same earthen pot. In the officers' club too,

he was assigned a separate table and a separate waiter—a Muslim. Because, the high caste Hindu waiters refused to serve him. Disgusted, he returned to Bombay and took the job of a teacher at the Sydenham College. He began organising the depressed castes, holding their conferences on a large scale and started a periodical, *Mooknayak*, to articulate the woes of dalits.

Being highly educated and articulate, Ambedkar was increasingly drawn in social and political activities of the untouchables. With help from Shahu Maharaj he returned to England to earn D.Sc. in economics and was called to the bar. Back in India, Ambedkar established in 1926 an association, *Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha*, (literally Congress for welfare of the boycotted) through which he sent a powerful message to the untouchables, “educate, organise and agitate”. Till this day, the untouchables of India, particularly of Maharashtra, have chanted this mantra, acted on it and have benefited immensely. He launched a historic movement to throw open to dalits the water tank at Mahad in Raigad district in 1927.

There in a large gathering of dalits, a Brahmin associate of Ambedkar burnt *Manusmriti*, the Hindu code book to declare rebellion against the caste system. Later, Ambedkar also led a movement to seek entry for the dalits in the famous Kalaram temple of Nasik. Ambedkar made it a point to depose before the Simon Commission in 1928 to enumerate the measures the state ought to take for improving the conditions of the untouchables. The Commission appointed by the British Government was boycotted by the Congress.

At the Round Table Conference in London in 1930, Dr. Ambedkar forcefully presented the case of the untouchables and demanded separate electorates for them. Gandhi opposed this demand and when the British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald conceded it, Gandhi went on a fast unto death in Pune’s Yerwada Jail to oppose the move. Ambedkar

wilted under the enormous pressure and was forced to compromise by accepting reservations instead of separate electorates in what is now known as Poona Pact between dalits and high castes.

That Ambedkar was reluctant to confine his activities to dalit amelioration alone is amply evident from the names of the political parties he successively established. Independent Labour Party in 1936, and later in the 50’s the Republican Party of India. In between in 1942, he founded the Scheduled Castes Federation of India. He was a member and the minister for labour in the Viceroy’s Governing Council between 1942 and 1946. Later, he was chosen as the chairman of the constitution drafting committee of the Constituent Assembly. He was the law minister in Nehru’s first cabinet of Independent India.

Ambedkar embraced Buddhism along with nearly a million followers at a public ceremony in Nagpur on October 14, 1956. The rest of his life’s mission, he decided, would be to spread the message of Buddha all over the world. Unfortunately, his health was failing him and he died in Delhi on December 6, 1956. His funeral procession in Mumbai the next day was said to be the largest ever witnessed in the metropolis.

### Y.B. Chavan

Yashwant Balwant Chavan is remembered not merely because he was the first chief minister of Maharashtra. Soon after its formation, Maharashtra acquired a high profile image of a progressive state committed to all round egalitarian development and presented a picture of solid political stability for nearly a decade and half. That was largely due to Chavan’s constructive vision, political dexterity, powerful Marathi oratory, rhetorical skills and a sophisticated liberal approach towards any issue. Chavan’s cultured personality, his mature approach to the state’s many



problems, his extra-ordinary skill to mobilise colleagues and adversaries alike for a common goal, his broad Nehruvian perspective coupled with practical realism and his deep understanding of the dynamics of government administration earned him respect and a high stature in Maharashtra. Even in the union cabinet he distinguished himself with these qualities.

During the harsh days of linguistic Maharashtra movement when he was the chief minister of the Bombay state, Chavan had to face insults and humiliations from the Marathi people, but he stuck to his position unflinchingly. His belief was, Nehru in his political wisdom and in the context of national interests would make an appropriate decision at the right time. On formation of Maharashtra, he remained the chief minister only for two years. But during that short span, he galvanised the people of all political hues for the development of the state. Administrators, bureaucrats, political adversaries, trade union leaders, farmers, industrialists and traders, writers and artistes—all fell for his charm and joined in his venture.

Chavan rose from an humble rural background and he was the first peasant Maratha leader of Maharashtra after Shivaji to win all round acceptance of the people at large. His ascendance also symbolised the end of Brahmin monopoly of political power for the preceding two centuries. On another plane, Chavan's rise from humble background of a poor rural family to the pinnacle of political power in Bombay provided a testimony to the egalitarian nature of the Indian democracy and avenues of progress it opened for the ordinary folk. Chavan, an astute parliamentarian and leader of men, was largely a self-made man.

Chavan was born in a poor peasant's family at a small village Devrashtre in Satara district on March 12, 1914. His father, a court bailiff, died when Chavan was young. And since the family was almost landless it was his mother

and elder brother who had to work hard to earn livelihood. The family had to go through all the hardships that the rural poor face. Chavan's mother and brothers wanted at least one child in the family to have proper education. Young Yashwant was chosen for this privilege. He more than fulfilled all the expectations of his family. He was enrolled in a school at Karad, a taluka town, where he came in contact with local groups of Gandhian Congressmen and freedom fighters. From then on he was drawn in the vortex of the freedom struggle. He was 15 year old when he raised the tri-colour on a tree in front of the school in defiance of prohibitory orders. As described earlier, during the 1942 movement, he was fully associated with the underground *patri sarkar* movement of Satara district.

As the first chief minister of Maharashtra, Chavan set cultured norms of governance, a mature standard of political discourse and democratic discipline of conduct in legislature. His constructive governance manifested in many state-sponsored institutions he created and projects he launched. There have been quite a number of rural leaders in Maharashtra who pioneered the cooperative activities in their respective areas. Chavan made it a policy to encourage and support all cooperative activities which enhanced the standard of living of the masses. The cooperative sugar movement of Maharashtra which triggered all round development activities in rural areas and mobilised the creative energies of the sturdy peasants owes its rapid growth to Chavan's direction and policies. Chavan evoked awe, admiration and loyalty among the Marathi cultural elite not only because of his many visionary schemes in the field of art and culture but also owing to his insight of Marathi literature, his erudition, his extensive reading and sophisticated tests. The state-sponsored project of the Marathi encyclopedia (Marathi Vishwakosh) that he

launched earned him many admirers among the Marathi intelligentsia.

Even after going to the Centre, Chavan kept a close eye on Maharashtra's affairs. He indubitably distinguished himself as an astute administrator and a mature statesman. On a few occasions he came close to occupying the highest political office in India. But many believe that Chavan, though an expert political player, did not possess that ultimate killing instinct.

10

## POLITICAL SCENARIO IN MAHARASHTRA TODAY

As related earlier, at the time of independence, the Marathi-speaking areas were split in different political dispensations for many centuries and yet there was an unmistakable sense of cultural unity and social homogeneity among the Marathi masses. The sociological structure of the villages, everyday culture of towns people and the peasants, folk rituals, sartorial and culinary culture, the deities, traditional festivals were the same with some regional variations. The folk songs and the spiritual poetry of the saint poets was on the lips of ordinary farmers from Gondia to Gadchiroli and Sakoli to Sawantwadi. Right from the early 19th century intellectuals regarded all Marathi-speaking areas as part of Maharashtra. At the time of partition of Bengal in 1905, newspapers such as *Kesari* in Pune expressed the grief of the Marathi people about not being together.

The idea of the political unity of linguistic Maharashtra was first specifically articulated by Vitthal Vaman Tamhankar in 1917 when he published the map of 'Maharashtra' in 1917 in his periodical which contained Vidarbha and Berar, the Marathwada districts in Hyderabad of Nizam and Goa under the Portuguese rule. Inspired by Gandhi, the Congress accepted the concept of reorganisation of provinces on linguistic basis and restructured its provincial Congress committees accordingly. Ever since, there were voices here and there demanding unification of Maharashtra. But not

much could be done under an alien rule when Marathwada particularly was under Nizam's rule. New possibilities opened as the country sensed the approach of independence. The first organised articulation of a unified linguistic Maharashtra was made by writers, journalists and poets at the All India Marathi Literary Conference held in Belgaum in May 1940. Credit for this goes to G.T. Madkholkar, novelist and journalist based at Nagpur for giving a call from the presidential podium of the conference to launch a movement for *samyukta* Maharashtra.

### The Long Wait

However, Maharashtra had to wait for 13 more years after independence. Hyderabad state was liberated from the Nizam's rule and incorporated in the Indian union in 1948. The first report of the Fazal Ali Commission on linguistic reorganisation of states in 1955 envisaged the Marathi state without Bombay and without Vidarbha. A massive wave of resentment swept all over Maharashtra with people resorting to strikes, processions and demonstrations. Some violence also took place. In Bombay 105 people were killed as the police fired on demonstrators. As a compromise, the leadership forged a gargantuan bilingual state of Bombay in 1956 comprising Marathi and Gujarati regions of the erstwhile Bombay Presidency, as also the five districts of Marathwada and eight of Vidarbha. Mr. Y.B. Chavan was the chief minister. In any case it was an unnatural and illogical formulation made under the pressures of vested interests while most linguistic groups in the country were awarded separate states.

For three years, vibrant agitations both by the Gujaratis and Maharashtrians demanding separate states rocked the bilingual. The 'Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti' an umbrella organisation under which most opposition parties of the state united to press the demand for Maharashtra, rode on

the wave of popularity and swept most of Maharashtra including Bombay like a hurricane in the 1958 general elections. Congress tottered and could retain its hold only because of the support from Vidarbha region and parts of Gujarat. That settled the issue and the linguistic state of Maharashtra uniting most Marathi-speaking areas for the first time was inaugurated by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru on May 1, 1960. Chavan continued to remain the chief minister. In the next elections in 1962-63, the voters demolished the Samiti and re-installed the Congress in Maharashtra with an overwhelming majority.

Apart from four years of bilingual Bombay state, Chavan remained the chief minister of linguistic Maharashtra only for two years. Impressed by his political skills and organisational acumen Nehru called him to Delhi to handle the Defence portfolio in the sensitive days after the 1962 war with China. Chavan remained in Delhi till the end of his life in 1984. But during the two years of his tenure at Maharashtra's helm, the direction and vision he provided to the state propelled it among the first rankers in India. Even while sitting in Delhi, he guided the state party and the government for nearly ten years. The many qualities and contributions of Chavan are discussed at another place in this book.

Thanks partly to the traditions carried from the freedom struggle and later to the sobering influence of Chavan, the Maharashtra Congress remained for many years a monolithic entity disciplined and creatively constructive. Barring an eighteen-month aberration in the post-emergency turmoil, Congress retained its hold on the state for nearly 35 years losing to a coalition of the BJP and the Shiv Sena in 1995.

The major parties active at various times in Maharashtra since 1960 have been Congress in its various incarnations, Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP), Praja Socialist Party (PSP),

Peasants and Workers Party (PWP), Republican Party of India (RPI), CPI, CPM, BJP (Jana Sangh in earlier incarnation) and the Shiv Sena. Most parties other than the Congress fought the 1957 and 1962 elections under the banner of Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti. The Samiti was demolished in the 1962 elections and withered away. With it the influence of the two socialist parties also waned. The two communist parties and the PWP continued to retain their respective small pockets. The BJP witnessed resurgence in the 90's but could not overtake the Shiv Sena in terms of representation in the state legislature.

The Peasants and Workers Party (PWP), formed in the turbulent years before creation of Maharashtra had attracted a rump from the left-inclined Congressmen, particularly those of the *bahujansamaj*, a euphemism for the Maratha caste. It also attracted intelligent leaders from other social segments and at one time it looked as if the PWP will become a formidable regional party of Maharashtra. But Chavan, who had resisted the sectarian appeal of that party, employed his full charm to lure its leaders one by one into the Congress fold. By the time Maharashtra came into being, the PWP had lost its appeals and within a decade it was marginalised into a few pockets here and there.

Shiv Sena, founded by the maverick cartoonist Bal Thackeray to champion the cause of the sons of the soil in 1966 was confined to metropolitan Bombay island for nearly 15 years and made its electoral presence felt across the creek and on to the mainland Maharashtra only after 1992/93. Though it still swears by the 'Marathi Manoos' and the Maratha spirit, it has left the sectarian agenda far behind to embrace the cosmopolitan multi-lingual voters of Mumbai, its only durable and secure bastion. After five years of formation of linguistic Maharashtra, Marathi speaking people of Mumbai, the capital of Maharashtra, started feeling the brunt of cosmopolitan and metropolitan brunt with

hordes of unemployed and educated Marathi youths roaming the city for jobs. Partly because of the easy-going nature of the Marathi youths who preferred cosy white-collared 10 to 5 jobs to demanding self-employment in the service sectors and partly because of rather sectarian entrepreneurs mainly from the outside the state who preferred people from their own states even for the lowly services, the local Maharashtrians felt neglected in the job markets even if their own government was in power in state.

Thackeray's sons-of-the-soil appeal immediately struck a chord in the Marathi hearts and they flocked to his fold in hundreds and thousands. Thackeray spoke the language of the common man and he had his finger on the pulse of the Marathi youths of Mumbai. Shiv Sena began its career by attacking the non-Maharashtrian Tamils and south Indians ('Madrasis' as they were called then) and captured the Bombay Municipal Corporation in the next elections in 1969. However, the Sena failed to evoke the entrepreneurial spirit among the Maharashtrians and barring some marginal gains in the public sector jobs for the Marathi youths the job situations for them hardly improved over the decades. Just when the Sena was waning in its appeal, Thackeray embraced the new-fangled Hindutva and then alone it could make some inroads across the creek in mainland Maharashtra.

Later, the Sena joined the bandwagon of the Bharatiya Janata Party to become a powerful player in Maharashtra's politics. By 21st Century, electoral politics obliged the Sena to soft-pedal its Marathi plank—barring fitful bursts whenever the Bombay municipal elections approached. It still mouths the 'Marathi Manoos' slogan whenever necessary but has established cozier relationship with most non-Maharashtrian groups of Mumbai, particularly the large number of Hindi-speaking voters. A majority of legislative council members and the Rajya Sabha M.P.s chosen by the

Sena have been non-Maharashtrians. Critics observe that the growth of the Shiv Sena is directly in inverse proportion to the decline in the culture and institutions of the Marathi speaking people of Mumbai. The Sena did provide some solace and a vague sense of security to the emotionally inclined Marathi youths.

The following chronological list of the chief ministers of the state from 1960 onwards suffices to demonstrate the iron grip which the Congress retained on the state for a long time. It was only after 1989 when the Sena joined hands with the B.J.P. and the Congress party began dismantling at the national level that the Congress lost its veneer in Maharashtra. Even so, it still remains the most influential party in the state which it recaptured in coalition with Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) in 1999 from the Shiv Sena—BJP combine.

#### Chief Ministers of Maharashtra

1. Yashwantrao B.Chavan (Cong.)	01.05.60 to 19.11.62
2. Marotrao Kannamwar (Cong.)	20.11.62 to 24.11.63
3. P.K.Sawant (Acting) (Cong.)	24.11.63 to 05.12.63
4. V.P.Naik (Cong.)	05.12.63 to 20.02.75
5. S.B.Chavan (Cong.)	21.02.75 to 15.05.77
	12.03.86 to 26.06.88
6. Vasantdada Patil (Cong S—Cong I)	17.05.77 to 05.03.78
	05.03.78 to 18.07.78
	02.02.83 to 09.03.85
	10.03.85 to 01.06.85
7. Sharad Pawar (PDF)	18.07.78 to 17.02.80
(Cong.)	26.06.88 to 04.03.90
	04.03.90 to 25.06.91
	06.03.93 to 14.03.95
8. A.R. Antulay (Cong.)	09.06.80 to 12.01.82
9. Babasaheb Bhosale (Cong.)	21.01.82 to 01.02.83
10. Shivajirao Nilangekar (Cong.)	03.06.85 to 06.03.86
11. Sudhakar Rao Naik (Cong.)	25.06.91 to 22.02.93

12. Manohar Joshi (SS-BJP)	14.03.95 to 31.01.99
13. Narayan Rane (SS-BJP)	01.02.99 to 18.10.99
14. Vilasrao Deshmukh (Cong.)	18.10.99 to 17.01.03
15. Sushilkumar Shinde (Cong.)	18.01.03 to 30.10.04
16. Vilasrao Deshmukh (Cong.)	01.11.04 – till date

The enduring success of the Congress party in Maharashtra is attributed partly to its traditional pre-independence culture and partly to the peculiar manner in which it was evolved and developed as a constructive organisation after independence. In regard to the latter aspect, Chavan's contribution is no less important. The rural powerful sections of aristocratic Marathas and peasant Marathas, wary of the Brahminic leadership of the party, had kept away from the Congress till emergence of Mahatma Gandhi on the horizon. That was also the time when the Marathas realised that with the widening electorates in whatever democratic institutions existed then, it was imperative to enter the political mainstream through the Congress party to retain their economic and political hold of rural Maharashtra.

Since Marathas comprise about 35 per cent of the population of the state, the largest community, demographic logic dictated their ascendance to power. Chavan's chief ministership underlined this reality. Equally significant was the fact that Chavan had risen from the ordinary peasants' stock and not from the blue-blooded Maratha aristocracy. Chavan fully embraced Nehru's concept of socialistic pattern of society and introduced many innovations in the state and implemented schemes towards achieving that aim. The state Congress unit, under his leadership, built a network of constructive workers trained through the village panchayats, local agricultural cooperative societies, zilla parishads and panchayat samitis. The cooperative sugar movement ensured and strengthened the Maratha hold on the rural

economy and provided a sound base for the Congress network. Significantly, when Chavan went to Delhi, the mantle of Maharashtra was passed on to V.P. Naik of Vidarbha, of an aristocratic nomadic feudal family, who ruled the state for nearly 11 years. It was during Naik's regime that Maharashtra witnessed an all round development and growth in rural prosperity.

Prosperity and political power flowed through sugar cooperatives which also became catalytic agents of change in the rural Maharashtra, particularly in western and south Maharashtra. Sugar cooperatives became centers of education and encouraged allied agricultural processing industries, poultry, milk cooperatives. Enterprising cooperative leaders set up schools and colleges, gave patronage to arts and culture creating a new ambience of growth and prosperity. But when sugar cooperatives began mushrooming only to obtain political clout without regard to feasibility and practical reality, a backlash started. There happened to be too many of them in a few districts (over 200 in 2003 of which only about 135 to 140 were in working condition). Vagaries of global sugar market also made an impact. These developments coincided with confusion in the top echelons of the party and fierce infighting and groupism in the state unit. The power of Congress began waning. The socio-political ambience helped the BJP and Shiv Sena fill the vacuum in 1995.

Bombay Presidency was among the best administered provinces of British India. This heritage continued after independence. As related earlier, Chavan as the chief minister of bilingual Bombay and later of Maharashtra, made a name as an astute administrator, dynamic decision maker and a statesman of vision opening up novel avenues through state initiatives in the fields of trade and industries, infrastructural developments, agriculture and rural enterprise and also in arts, literature and culture. The

reputation of Maharashtra's dynamic administration was maintained.

Mention must be made of the Panchayat Raj system in Maharashtra. Prior to formation of the linguistic Maharashtra, there were different acts and rules in regard to local self-government in Vidarbha, Marathwada and regions in Bombay Presidency. Maharashtra was the first state to adopt a comprehensive panchayat system by passing the relevant acts in 1961. Election were immediately held to the local bodies which began functioning from August 15, 1962. Panchayati Raj administration in Maharashtra is a three tier organisation—zilla parishads at district level, panchayat samiti at taluka level and village panchayat at the bottom.

Despite certain aberrations in the intervening period, by and large the system is functioning adequately in Maharashtra. Chavan the astute administrator that he was saw an opportunity in the system to nurse the party workers. In a few years, Congress persons elected to the legislative bodies were those who had gone through the mill of the local self-government and had acquired the basic administrative experience. They understood the quirks of the administrative machinery and knew how to deliver goods to their constituencies. The Congress party's prolonged hold on the state's politics can also be seen from this angle.



## ECONOMIC SCENARIO IN MAHARASHTRA TODAY

Maharashtra is among the richer states of India with a per capita income 40 per cent higher than the all-India average. The income is derived more from industrial and service activities, i.e. secondary and tertiary sectors. With its peculiar geographical terrain it is difficult for the state to attain its full irrigation potential which is also very low compared to many other states. It is nearly self-sufficient in food grains production. However, in the last few decades, the dynamic farmers of Maharashtra have turned to sugarcane cultivation, horticulture and floriculture in a big way. The cooperative movement has changed the face of rural Maharashtra dramatically.

The state has been a leader in industrial development in the country with concentration of textile mills, chemical, petro-chemical, fertilisers, engineering and automobile industries. Mumbai, the capital of Maharashtra, has been a magnet for industries and commercial and financial activities. Apart from Mumbai being a port city, the efficient rail, road and air communications with the hinterland and availability of a skilled and disciplined work force has contributed to Mumbai's rise as the prime commercial centre of India. Along with Mumbai, neighbouring Thane, Pune and Nasik districts have also witnessed a remarkable growth in industrial and commercial activities during the last four decades. However, with these activities largely confined to

this belt, the average development parameters of the state as a whole barely conform to Maharashtra's image as the most advanced state. The mineral base of Maharashtra is substantial. Coal, manganese, iron ore, lime stone and tin are some of the minerals found in abundance in a belt stretching across Chandrapur, Gadchiroli, Bhandara, Nagpur and Yavatmal districts of east Vidarbha.

To give a glimpse of the vibrant economic, industrial and commercial activity in Maharashtra, status of agriculture and the amount of wealth generated in the state, brief accounts of chosen areas are given without going into elaborate details.

### Population

The population of the state was 96,752,000 which was 9.4 per cent of India's population as per 2001 census. After Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra is the second largest state in the country in terms of population. As on March 1, 2003, the projected population of the state is about 10.09 crore. Maharashtra is also the second most urbanised state after Tamil Nadu with 42.4 per cent people living in urban areas. The density of population per sq. km is 314. The sex ratio was placed at 922 females against 1000 males which is a climb down from 934 in 1991, a consequence of a continuous influx of a large number of people from other states seeking jobs, careers and livelihood in Mumbai and other industrial magnets in Maharashtra such as Pune, Thane, Nasik, Aurangabad and Nagpur-Chandrapur.

Population increased by 10 per cent between 1991-2001. In fact the decadal population growth rate of Maharashtra during the last six decades has been higher than the average for India. This is again attributed to in-migration on account of growth of industries and service sectors, trade opportunities and massive self-employment opportunities. The Economic Survey of Maharashtra 2002-2003 estimated

four lakh net migrants in the state per year during 1991-2001. The literacy rate of population aged seven years and above increased from 64.9 per cent in 1991 to 77.3 per cent in 2001.

### State Domestic Product

The Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) of Maharashtra at 1993-94 constant prices was expected to grow at the rate of 4 per cent in 2002-2003 which was less than 6.8 per cent of the previous year. At current prices, the GSDP in 2001-2002 was estimated at Rs. 2,71,406 crore as against Rs. 2,38,875 the previous year.

### Income and Debts

At current prices the net state domestic income of the state in 2001-2002 was Rs. 2,41,877 crore and per capita state income was Rs. 24,736. The state's revenue deficit has increased from Rs. 55 crore in 1990-91 to Rs. 6,245 crore in 2001-02. During the same period the total government expenditure has increased from Rs. 10,432 crore to Rs. 42,662 crore. The government debts have soared from Rs. 10,724 crore in 1990-91 to Rs. 61,123 crore at the end of 2001-02. By end 2003-04, the debt is expected to cross Rs. 90,000 crore.

### Agriculture

Although Maharashtra is one of the most industrialised and urbanised state agriculture and allied activities still dominate with about 55 per cent of the people dependent on them. And yet, the contribution of the agricultural sector to the state income is decreasing consistently over the years. Of the 3.08 lakh sq.km land area of the state, agriculture covers 1.76 lakh sq.km. i.e. 57.3 per cent. The corresponding all India figure is 43.4 per cent. However, the general quality of the soil, topography and climate in Maharashtra is not much conducive to agricultural advance. Despite consistent

efforts by the state and the innovative farmers themselves, the per hectare crop yield in Maharashtra remains lower than the national average.

The rain-shadow belt which cuts north to south across the state occupies nearly one third area of Maharashtra. Droughts and famines frequently visit shadowed regions drastically reducing the average yield. Moreover, the proportion of gross irrigated area (36.7 lakh hectares) to gross cropped area is just 16.4 per cent, which is far below the national average percentage of 38.2. This has not changed much for the last decade underscoring the limitations of the state's irrigation potential. Moreover, of the net irrigated area of 29.8 lakh hectares in that year, the area under well irrigation was 19.2 lakh hectares. The estimated irrigation potential of the state is 126 lakh hectares. After completing a number of major, medium and minor irrigation schemes, the total irrigation potential created till June 2002 was 49.26 lakh hectares. Well irrigation contributes 55 per cent of the total irrigation. This makes agriculture in the state vulnerable to droughts. The terrain allows only a marginally higher irrigation potential than that achieved so far. Despite these natural difficulties, the innovative farmers of Maharashtra, by dint of hard work and persistence and aided by the government schemes, have succeeded in bringing a near green revolution.

The state is now self-sufficient in food grains production and has forged ahead in horticulture and floriculture in a big way. The areas and production of some main horticultural crops in the state have increased manifold during the decade ended 2001-02. The area under banana has increased from 29,000 hectares in 1990-91 to 72,100 hectares in 2001-02 and production from 16,04,000 to 43,31,300 tones. The corresponding figures for orange crop are hectares 30,000 to 1,54,200 and tones 2,29,000 to 8,33,100; grapes: hectares 15,000 to 32,400 and tones 2,45,000 to

9,37,000; mango: hectares 77,600 to 4,09,500 and tones 2,44,400 to 5,59,000; cashew nut: hectares 15,000 to 1,53,300 and tones 11,200 to 11,25,200. Maharashtra's mangoes, grapes, cashew nuts and oranges have found lucrative markets all over the world.

The average size of land holding in Maharashtra has decreased from 4.28 hectares in 1970-71 to 2.21 hectares in 1990-91 - nearly by half - as the Agricultural Census of 1990-91 reveals. The land tenancy laws came into force in Maharashtra between 1957 and 1965. The right of ownership was conferred on about 14.92 lakh tenants in respect of 17.36 lakh hectares by end of March 2002.

### Co-operative Activities

Thanks to the vibrant cooperative activities, the face of rural Maharashtra has dramatically changed over the last few decades. The living standards of the peasants, particularly in West and South Maharashtra as also in parts of Marathwada, have visibly improved largely owing to cooperative enterprise in many areas. Agricultural credit, agro-processing industries, agricultural produce marketing, consumer stores and social services all have received a healthy boost with the touch of cooperative spirit. There were a total of 1,65,789 cooperative societies in the state as of March end 2003. The breakdown is given in Table 1.

The membership of all the cooperative societies in the state at the end of March 2002 was 439.39 lakh, which is more than tenfold of the membership in 1961.

It is of interest to note that of a total of 39,521 cooperative societies involved in production activities, 849 were independent processing units dealing with sugarcane, raw cotton, paddy, oil seeds etc. Of these, the registered cooperative sugar mills in the state numbered 201 of which 135 were in production during the year 2001-02. These factories together crushed 484 lakh tones of cane producing

Table 1

1.	Apex and central credit institutions:	
	a. agricultural	32
	b. non-agricultural	02
2.	Primary agricultural credit societies	20,674
3.	Non-agricultural credit societies	23,674
4.	Marketing Societies	1,140
5.	Productive enterprises (including sugar & rice mills, dairy cooperatives etc.)	59,521
6.	Social service and other co-operative societies (consumer & housing etc.)	80,865
	Total	1,65,789

56.28 lakh tones of sugar. In 2002-03, the factories crushed 507 lakh tones of cane and produced 59.11 lakh tones of sugar.

As related earlier, the cooperative sugar movement ignited the spark of development in rural Maharashtra with prosperous farmers turning their enterprising spirit to horticulture, poultry, dairy farming, diversified small industries and educational institutions. Huge departmental stores appeared in taluka places of Kolhapur and Sangli districts much earlier than in growing cities like Pune and Nagpur. The purchasing power of the peasants of Kolhapur district is considered among the highest in rural India.

### Power

Maharashtra is among the very few states which sell electricity to other states. Of the total installed capacity of 12,963 MW in the state on March end 2002, the thermal capacity accounted for 62.3 per cent, hydro 22.2 per cent, natural gas 14 per cent and nuclear (state's share) 1.5 per cent. Being a highly industrialised state, demand for electricity is high. The Maharashtra State Electricity Board (MSEB) dominates generation and distribution of power. A few agencies such as Tata Electric and Bombay Suburban

Electric Supply had held licenses to generate and distribute power in restricted areas. With the new policies of liberalisation, the power sector is opening up to private enterprise. Dabhol Power Company is one such beginning. The MSEB still dominates with 75 per cent production. Mumbai is among the very few cities of India where power failure—industrial or domestic—is a rare.

The state had undertaken rural electrification in early 70's and had achieved 100 per cent village electrification by March 1989. Within the next decade all identified Harijan bastis numbering 33,711 which were feasible for electrification were electrified. Similarly, the state is now endeavouring to supply power to wadis, the very small satellite localities of villages. Till 2002 March 37,481 wadis were electrified. The total number of agricultural pumps energised by March 2002 was 23.67 lakh.

### **Transport and Communication**

Although Maharashtra's capital Mumbai is well connected to the world and Indian hinterland by rail, road, air and sea, and intercity road connections within the state are adequate, the same cannot be said about railway connections. Air connections are also few and far between. However, by and large, most of the district towns, taluka places and smaller commercial centres are connected to Mumbai by the state-owned Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) one of the biggest road service operators in India.

The total road length in the state by March end 2002 was 2.66 lakh km which came to about 86 km per 100 sq. km and 269 km per 100,000 people. Though this compares favourably with all India average (77 km per 100 sq km), Maharashtra on this score lags considerably behind many states such as Assam (109 km), Goa (264 km), Kerala (382 km), Orissa (169 km), Nagaland (123 km), Tamil Nadu (118

km), Tripura (148 km), Uttar Pradesh (97 km) and West Bengal (89 km).

The MSRTC owns nearly 17,000 buses, carries about 63 lakh passengers per day, effectively covers nearly 50 lakh kms in a day on about 20,000 routes. Public transport facilities are provided by the MSRTC in 21 cities and by the respective civic bodies in 13 other towns and cities. The largest of the civic undertakings is the Bombay Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) undertaking which owns 3,500 buses carrying 40 lakh passengers daily.

The total rail route length in Maharashtra is 5,459 kms which is just 8.6 per cent of the total length in the country. Again, the length per 1000 sq. km in the state was 18 km as against 19 for the nation. The proportion of electrification of routes and double rails in Maharashtra is, however, higher than the India average—35.4 per cent and 31.4 per cent respectively, the Indian average proportion being 25.3 per cent and 24.4 per cent.

Maharashtra has two major ports along its 720 km coastline, namely Mumbai and Jawaharlal Nehru port at Nhava-Sheva just across the Mumbai on the mainland. Besides these, there are 48 notified minor ports. Bombay continues to enjoy its pre-eminent position as a magnate attracting trade and commerce through its port. Bombay Port handled a total of nearly 250 lakh tones of cargo in 2001 - 02 of which about 170 lakh tones was overseas cargo. During the same year, the modern state-of-the-art JNPT handled nearly 225 lakh tones of cargo.

The state has one international and five domestic airports. The Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport is in Mumbai. The other domestic airports are in Mumbai Nagpur, Aurangabad, Pune and Kolhapur.

### **Commercial Banks**

The total number of branches of scheduled commercial banks

in Maharashtra by end 2002 was 6,320 which accounted for nearly 9.5 per cent of total branches in India. Of these branches in Maharashtra, 36 per cent were in rural areas, 17 per cent in semi-urban areas and remaining 47 per cent in the urban areas. Maharashtra stands first in India in respect of both the aggregate bank deposits and gross bank credits as on June end 2002 which account for 20 and 33 per cent respectively of all India figures. Many major scheduled banks have their headquarters in Mumbai.

### Joint Stock Companies

Maharashtra had 1,29,044 joint stock companies in March 2002 which make for 21.9 per cent of the total number in India. Of these 90.6 per cent were private and 9.4 per cent public companies. The total paid up capital of these companies was Rs. 74,974 crore end March 2002 which again accounted for 19.4 per cent of the national figure for paid up capital.

### Capital Market

As for capital market, three major stock exchanges function in Mumbai and one in Pune. They are Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), National Stock Exchange (NSE) and Pune Stock Exchange (PSE). Besides, two other exchanges are activated recently—Over The Counter Stock Exchange (OTCSE) and Inter Connect Stock Exchange (ICSE). There are a total of 23 stock exchanges in the country. The trading volumes in equity segments of all stock exchanges have witnessed a phenomenal growth in recent years though during 2001-02 there was a drastic fall. It picked up again from 2003 onwards scaling new heights. During the year 2001-02, the turnover of stock exchanges in Maharashtra was 8,21,789 crore which was about 92 per cent of the total turnover of all the stock exchanges in the country. Not for nothing Bombay is described as the financial capital of India.

### Industries

The high level of industrialisation of Maharashtra is evident from its consistent contribution of more than 20 per cent in the value of output in the organised industrial sector of the country. The annual Survey of Industries (ASI) for 2000-01 confirms Maharashtra's continued lead in this area. It contributed 21.5 per cent of the total net value added in the organised industrial sector of the country. That other industrially advanced states in the country are far behind Maharashtra in this respect is revealed in the following table:

Table 2

States having more than 5% share in net value added in organised industrial sector in India (2000-01)		
1.	Maharashtra	21.5%
2.	Gujarat	11.7%
3.	Tamil Nadu	11.4%
4.	Uttar Pradesh	6.7%
5.	Andhra Pradesh	6.2%
6.	Kerala	5.8%

(Source: Annual Survey of Industries)

After a sharp fall in the index number of industrial production (IIP) in the previous year, the IIP of Maharashtra has shown substantial recovery in 2002-03. The IIP covers mining, manufacturing and electricity sectors and it is a measure of industrial growth devised by the Central Statistical Organisation. Chemicals and chemical products, machinery and equipments, textiles, food products, refined petroleum products, basic metals, motor vehicles, trailers and other transport equipment contribute substantially to the industrial production of the state.

According to the ASI, the industry divisions which together contributed 75 per cent to the industrial production in the state were: (i) chemical and chemical products 17.6% (ii) food products 16.1% (iii) refined petroleum products

12.9% (iv) machinery and equipments 8.0% (v) textiles 6.9% (vi) basic metals 5.8% (vii) motor vehicles 4.7% (viii) furniture 3.3%

The high standard of Maharashtra's performance in the industrial sector can be gauged from the fact that the figures for labour productivity ratio and output per worker as also annual wages per worker in the state are substantially high than averages for India. The figures for 2000-01 were:

Table 3

	<i>Maharashtra</i>	<i>India</i>
Labour productivity ratio:	5.24	4.92
Output per worker (Rs. in lakhs)	22.02	15.13
Annual wages per worker (in Rs.)	68,758	47,835

For some years Maharashtra's industrial policy has been to promote information technology, high tech, knowledge-based and bio-technology industries. Fiscal incentives are being offered to give a competitive edge to the state's industry. A scheme of special economic zones has been introduced to attract foreign direct investment and boost imports.

Main export products of the state are gems and jewellery, readymade garments, cotton yarns, made-up fabrics, machinery and instruments, metal products and agro-based products. The total exports from Maharashtra in the year 2001-02 amounted to Rs. 66,938 crore, a rise of over 32 per cent over the previous year's exports.

Thus, Maharashtra generally presents an overall robust picture of industrial and economic growth and wealth creation. Despite some serious setbacks in the 90's to trade, commerce and industrial investment, Maharashtra's performance in industrial activity and attracting investment has remained fairly high, next only to Gujarat. In respect of per capita income, it was only marginally lower than Punjab. However, despite the strong track record, Maharashtra also

presents the picture of uneven distribution of growth. The growth essentially has been urban centric and so has drawn more and more people to urban areas straining the resources of urban sector. The fact is that it is the vibrant economic and financial activity, trade and commerce in the dynamic metropolitan region of Mumbai, as also Mumbai-centric industrial activities in Thane-Pune-Nasik triangle that push the statistical figures for the state as a whole to exciting levels.

The annual economic survey of the state has been pointing out for years the fact that minus the Mumbai-Thane-Pune belt, Maharashtra will fall short in many development parameters to compete with other developed states. Moreover, Maharashtra's major wealth creation and growth has been in non-agricultural sectors. Growth in employment generation is found only in five of the 35 districts of Maharashtra— Mumbai, Pune, Thane, Nasik and Nagpur. The urban-centric growth has led to sharply uneven pattern of development with pockets of urban affluence on the one hand and areas of poverty on the other.

### Regional disparities

As the Human Development Report Maharashtra 2002 points out, the problem of Maharashtra is uneven distribution of wealth. Reasons are many. One is of course the uneven distribution of resources. Second is poor quality of agricultural land. Third is vulnerability of vast tracts of agricultural land to droughts and famines. The irrigation potential is comparatively low. Other reasons are historic and political. When Maharashtra State was formed, different regions were at different stages of development. Marathwada coming from the Nizam's state had few industries with little infrastructural development. Vidarbha was in minority in the majority Hindi speaking regions of the Central Province and hence had nursed a grievance of discrimination. When these two regions joined Maharashtra,



they were far too underdeveloped compared to the latter. These regional disparities continued for years. The Western Maharashtra, which was part of erstwhile Bombay Presidency, with its agricultural innovations and political enterprise, forged ahead.

Post 1960, several steps were taken to remove the regional disparities. But the political and work culture of different regions has contributed to accumulation of massive regional development backlogs, an issue which has now become a matter of political contention. In 1984, a fact-finding committee on regional imbalance under eminent economist Dr. V.M. Dandekar quantified the total development backlog for Maharashtra at 1982-83 prices at Rs. 3,177 crore. Region wise, the backlog was Vidarbha—1,246 crore, Western Maharashtra—884 crore, Marathwada—751 crore and Konkan 296 crore. The figures are multiplied manifold since then for Vidarbha. Regional development boards were established in 1994 under Article 371(2) of the Constitution which provide statutory guarantee to the policy and process of removing regional disparities.

However, as Dr. Dandekar had pointed out, disparities manifest at regional levels as also within the regions at district levels. The striking feature is the wide disparities in income across the districts. Disparities within the district cloud the fact of large pockets of poverty in those districts. For example, pauperisation of peasants in the drought-prone districts of wealthy Western Maharashtra such as Dhule, Nasik, Ahmednagar, Pune, Satara, Sangli and Sholapur districts has no parallel in Vidarbha. Dhule with a per capita domestic product of Rs.11,789 is the poorest district. The corresponding figure for Mumbai is Rs. 45,471.

The Maharashtra Human Development Report has systematically classified the districts on the basis of per capita domestic product. It lists Dhule, Jalna, Osmanabad, Nanded, Yavatmal, Latur, Buldhana and Parbhani districts as the

poorest accounting for 11 per cent of the state domestic product (SDP). Five of these districts belong to Marathwada.

Ratnagiri, Bhandara, Ahmednagar, Satara, Akola and Jalgaon spread over all regions of Maharashtra together contribute 14.3 per cent of the income and belong to a lower-middle category. Wardha, Gadchiroli, Amravati, Sholapur, Chandrapur, Aurangabad, Sindhudurg and Sangli constitute the upper-middle category, their total contribution being 14.8 per cent. The richest districts are Nasik, Kolhapur, Pune, Nagpur, Raigad, Thane and Mumbai which together account for 60 per cent of the state's SDP. Thane and Raigad districts of Konkan region, which have large tracts of poverty in the remote Adivasi areas, have the privilege to belong to this category owing to close proximity to metropolitan Mumbai. Mumbai accounts for 25 per cent of the state's income followed by Thane (10%), Pune (9%) and Nagpur (5%).

Despite these disparities, the incidence of poverty in Maharashtra's rural areas, above the national average till recently, has dramatically decreased and fallen below the national figure in 1999-2000. However, the increase in the number of poor in urban Maharashtra, a consequence of immigration, was greater than that in India. But with pronounced decline in the rural poverty, the overall incidence of poverty (rural and urban combined) is now lower than the average for India.

### Employment Guarantee Scheme

Among the measures for alleviation of poverty in Maharashtra, mention must be made of a unique scheme launched by the state in 1972-73 namely the Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS). The scheme provides employment to the rural poor as a matter of right. It began as a relief measure during the harsh drought of 1972-73 when it generated employment to the extent of 4.5 million person-days thus safeguarding food security and minimising

economic and nutritional insecurity of the affected peasants. Within seven years, the EGS reach expanded to over 20 crore person-days employment at a cost of Rs.109 crore.

The radical scheme received statutory support in 1979 with the implementation of the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Act, 1977 which gives a peasant a right to demand work in the vicinity of his village. The state has statutory obligation to provide him/her work within specific perimeter and period. *Magel tyala kaam* (whoever seeks gets work) is the slogan of the scheme. The scheme is applicable in rural areas and in very small 'C' class municipal towns. While the scheme provides employment and nutrition to the needy, particularly in times of distress, it gets done several development and infrastructural works in the rural areas from the employed. The works undertaken under the scheme besides usual road building and metal breaking include, nala bunding, various methods of soil conservation and water storage, well construction, horticulture programmes, social forestry, tuti tree plantation and sericulture.

The scheme, praised by the World Bank, is now adopted by the Center. It has served Maharashtra well in reducing rural poverty and unemployment. It has also served three more purposes—raising the average wage level of agricultural workers and reducing the variability in the wage rate. Currently, the daily wage level at the EGS works, computed out on the basis of volumetric work done by the employed ranges between Rs.45 and Rs.51. Above all, the scheme has effectively stemmed the tide of Maharashtra's rural poor surging towards the urban centers.

Finally, a comparative picture of Maharashtra in terms of a few selected socio-economic indicators will facilitate a better perspective of the state's niche on India's development map.

Table 4

Indicator	Maharashtra	India
Geographical area (lakh sq.km.)	967.52	10,270.15
Population density	314	324
Percentage of urban population	42.40	27.78
Sex ratio	922	933
Percentage of SC&ST population	20.37	24.56
Percentage of main workers	36.87	30.55
Percentage of agricultural workers	55.41	58.40
Female workers participation rate	32.59	25.68
<b>Literacy percentage</b>		
Males	86.87	75.85
Females	67.51	54.16
Total	77.27	65.38
<b>Life expectancy at birth (years)</b>		
Males	66.75	64.11
Females	69.76	65.43
Infant mortality rate	48	68
Per capita income at current prices (Rs.)	22,179	16,707
Students in primary & secondary schools per thousand population	207	172
<b>Agricultural yield per hectare (kg.)</b>		
Total cereals	937	1808
Total pulses	573	601
Total foodgrains	889	1646
Cotton lint	134	214
Sugarcane	87,818	70,972
Per capita foodgrains production (kg)	103	188.8
Fertilizer consumption per hectare	75.76	87.56
Percentage of irrigated to cropped area	15.4	39.2
Net area sown per cultivator(hectare)	1.7	1.3
<b>Average daily factory employment per lakh population</b>	1,340	1,139
Per capita gross output in industries (Rs.)	19,470	9,111
Per capita value added in industries (Rs.)	3,185	1,417
Per capita domestic electricity consumption (kwh)	121.70	75.15

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Maharashtra</i>	<i>India</i>
Per capita industrial electricity consumption (kwh)	178.30	107.00
Motor vehicles per lakh population	6,429	4,794
Road length per 100 sq.km. area (km)	86	77
Fair price ration shops per lakh population	51	46
Banking offices per lakh population	6.4	6.3
Deposits per capita (Rs.)	19,866	10,468
Per capita bank credit (Rs.)	21,275	6,523

(Source: Economic Survey of Maharashtra - 2002-03)

In conclusion, it may be observed that while Maharashtra is much behind the national average in agricultural sector, it is many paces ahead in industries and banking. Reasons for Maharashtra's backwardness in agriculture are enumerated elsewhere. Despite adversities, Maharashtra has been straining hard to surmount the difficulties in this area. It has forged ahead in agro-based processing industries and horticulture. The vibrant cooperative movement in Maharashtra has helped the peasants in overcoming the physical and climatic shortcomings of the terrain.

The following table will illustrate pattern of development of the state over the last four decades.

Table 5

<i>Item</i>	<i>1960-61</i>	<i>2001-02</i>
<b>Administrative setup</b>		
Districts	26	35
Inhabited villages	35,851	43,722
Towns	266	378
<b>Population</b>		
Population of males (in thousand)	20,429	50,334
Population of females (in thousand)	19,125	46,418
Density of Population (per sq. km.)	129	314

<i>Item</i>	<i>1960-61</i>	<i>2001-02</i>
Percentage of urban population	28.22	42.40
Sex ratio (females per thousand males)	936	922
<b>Income</b>		
State income (current prices) (crore Rs.)	1,889	2,41,877+
Primary sector (crore Rs.)	649	38,610+
Secondary sector (crore Rs.)	486	62,222+
Tertiary sector (crore Rs.)	754	1,41,045+
Per capita state income (in Rs)	484	24,736+
<b>Agriculture</b>		
Percentage of gross irrigated area to gross cropped area	6.5	16.4
Area under all cereals (thousand hec.)	10,606	9,411
Area under all pulses (thousand hec.)	2,349	3,388
Area under sugarcane (thousand hec.)	155	664
Area under cotton (thousand hec.)	2,500	3,105
Area under groundnut (thousand hec.)	1,083	429
<b>Production of crops (in thousand tones)</b>		
All cereals	6,755	9,305
All pulses	989	1,880
Sugarcane	10,404	45,140
Cotton	284	457
<b>Livestock (in thousand)</b>		
Total livestock	20,048	39,638
Total poultry	10,577	35,392
<b>Tractors (in thousand)</b>	1,427	79,893
<b>Forest area (sq.km.)</b>	63,544	61,935
<b>Factories</b>		
Working factories	8,010	28,324
Average-daily-employment(in thousand)	746	1,201
Employment per lakh population	1,886	1,233
<b>Power</b>		
Total generation (million kwh)	3,268	64,138
Total consumption (million kwh)	2,720	46,338
Industrial consumption (million kwh)	1,853	17,435
Agricultural consumption (million kwh)	15	8,730

Item	1960-61	2001-02
Domestic consumption (million kwh)	260	11,901
<b>Banking</b> (scheduled)		
Bank offices	1471*	6,320
<b>Education</b>	(in 1971)	
Primary Schools	34,494	68,736
Enrolment (in thousand)	4,178	11,709
Secondary & Higher Secondary Schools	2,468	16,647
Enrolment (in thousand)	855	10,094
<b>Health</b>		
Hospitals	299*	1,102
Dispensaries	1,372*	1,544
Beds per lakh population	88*	106
Infant mortality rate	86	48
<b>Transport</b>		
Railway length (km.)	5,056	5,459
Total Road length (km.)	39,241	2,22,600
Of which surfaced	24,852	1,88,308
Motor vehicles (in thousand)	100	7,506
<b>Local self government</b>		
Zilla Parishads	25	33
Gram Panchayats	21,636	27,832
Panchayat Samitis	295	349

\* Data as in 1971

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## ART AND CULTURE

### Folk Culture

Maharashtra has a rich folk culture which has an organic relationship with its rural social life, agricultural cycle and festivals which again correspond with progressive farming and harvesting processes. Music, instrumental and vocal, dance, story-telling, paintings in the form of rangoli or wall paintings or murals and in many tribal cultures sculpture too are integrated in the rhythm of the daily life. A village daily life usually began and ended rhythmically to the tunes or beats of this or that form of traditional folk ritual. The actors or carriers of the various forms also used to function till recently as communication links between the island—like self-sufficient villages. The folk artists—*vasudev*, *nandivala*, *bahurupee*, *potraj vaghya-murali*, *joshi*, *gondhali*, *lalit* performers, *tamasha* performers, *keertankar*—all moved from one place to another, carrying messages and news, arranging matches and providing entertainment mixed with raw spiritualism on the way.

A day in the life of an ordinary village began early morning with women folk singing *ovis* (often extempore songs composed on the spur) to the accompaniment of pounding or grinding the grains. Just when they were at this task and the villages echoed with the sweet tingling of the cowbells, the *vasudev* donning a long cap made of colourful peacock feathers passed along the village road singing a devotional song or playing a flute. The women

gave him alms, often without asking. The *vasudev* was followed by a drum-beating *nandivala* with a decorated bull behind him. No sooner than the *nandivala*'s drum-beats fade away, the *bahurup* or the *joshi* would announce arrival, the former with drums and one-stringed instrument and the latter with the chanting of the mantras. Sometime in the afternoon, the *potraj* loudly lashing himself on the back with a thick and long whip made of ropes accompanied by insistent drum beats and wails from his wife would create a sensation for the village children. The farm work was accompanied by sturdy songs rendered by men in the field.

The evening lengthened either with the singing of *bhajans* by local singers or the performance of a *keertan*, a sophisticated one-man performance where the *keertankar* would lucidly tell a mythological tale with a spiritual and moral message interspersed with semi-classical singing of *bhajans* or chanting of Sanskrit shlokas. Often the Brahmin *keertankar*, swayed by devotion would indulge in dancing steps. On some nights, a *vaghya murali* group would stage a show in the open. Or a ritualistic '*gondhal*' performance at some house would attract people. A row of bullock carts bringing in a *tamasha* troupe was a joyous occasion for the menfolk as that harbingered a week or a fortnight of feast of romantic music and dance by a bevy of beautiful belles.

The tribal communities in Maharashtra, as elsewhere in India, draw deep inspiration from rhythm and music in the daily chores of their life. Music is inevitably linked with dancing or other choreographic movements. Warlis, Bhils, Mahadeo Kolis, Gonds, Korkus, Madias, Katkaris, Kolams and Gaveets are some of the hilly or jungle tribes of Maharashtra each one having a rich repertoires of songs and music.

With modernisation of rural life, the old wealth of folk music is shrinking. Scholars have identified over sixty categories of folk music/songs in Maharashtra—morning

songs, evening songs, ritual songs, game-songs, work songs etc., each type having different nuances or dialectic variations in different regions. This is considered only a fraction of the original wealth of Maharashtra's folk music.

### Music in Maharashtra

Notwithstanding its thorny ruggedness and matter-of-fact character of its society, Maharashtra is basically a passionate lover of music. Not the legendary exponents alone, neither only the elites loving the subtleties of the classical Hindustani music. There is an across the board involvement of the people with music of different types. Folk music, popular music and classical music—all find their place in the social and cultural life of Maharashtra as we have seen while discussing the folk music. The serious singers, the scholarly students and street singers all have a place. There has been a continuous tradition of study and practice of music in Maharashtra from historic times.

The *Gathasaptashati*, a compilation of seven hundred stanzas or stories edited by King Hala of first century has a rich literary and musical content. Composed in early Marathi or Maharashtri Prakrit as it is described, it is a non-musicological work but reveals many facets of musical traditions, contemporary disciplines, categories and types of music, both vocal and instrumental. The massive compilation is in fact selected from over one crore gathas in circulation in the contemporary society. Apart from the gathas themselves being a singable work, as all written work in ancient India has been to facilitate memorising, the language itself (Maharashtri Prakrit) was supposed to be rhythmic and singable. Scholars attribute the origin of the gathas to the folk songs of the previous few centuries which were in folk practice accompanied by musical and rhythmic instruments.

Scholars also say that there were troupes of singer, dancers and actors touring the countryside giving

performances all round the year to mark different agricultural festivals. Several musical instruments are mentioned in the gatha. A detailed study of the Gathasaptashati leads to the conclusion that it reflects the variety of musical instruments, the multiple modes of their use, the varied status of the performers as also the different occasions on which music was performed in Maharashtra nearly two thousand years ago. Music of all categories existed and the prevailing culture was permeated with music, says Dr. Ashok D. Ranade, a scholar of music.

This conclusion bears testimony in the Ajanta paintings and Ellora caves which together cover a period between 200 B.C. to 1200 A.D. The works at these two places depict a rich variety of social and cultural life of commoners and royalties both. The paintings and the sculptures both depict musicians, dancers and various other performers as also a number of musical instruments in contemporary vogue. The *kinnaras* and *apsars* the heavenly musicians and performers appear in the works repeatedly.

#### Music in Yadav Period

Another encyclopaedic work dating to pre-Yadav period, *Abhilashitarthachintamani* or *Manasollasa* also reveals the musical life of Maharashtra before the advent of the Muslims. Compiled by a scholar King Someshwara III of the Chalukya dynasty (1130), the compendium consists of 20 chapters on topics ranging from philosophy, armed forces to politics. Two chapters deal with music and musical instruments (*Gitavinod* and *Gitavadya*). From King Someshwara's description, it appears that in his time regular musical concerts used to be held with elaborate sitting arrangements. The concerts were attended by, among others, the *rasikas* (connoisseurs), *kaladakshas* (experts), scholars and the elites besides the royal couple. There used to be a *sabhapati* or a chairman of each concert chosen with certain procedure.

Someshwara also describes the number and content of the ragas prevalent in his days and describes the specific occasions and times when specific ragas were sung. He also distinguishes between *desi* and traditional music.

There are references to musical forms current even today such as *ovis* sung by women performing domestic chores, particularly when pounding or grinding grains, *dhaval* or marriage songs and the *gondhali* songs. The king discusses several musical forms and lists musical instruments in vogue in the contemporary culture. It is important to note that Someshwara's treatise, scientific and methodical, also refers to the fact that the practice of music—instrumental and vocal—was prevalent in his era in all its types—classical, traditional, folk and popular which again indicates that the musical culture thrived in all the classes of the society.

During the Yadav period, beginning 900 A.D., several significant works on music were produced by scholars. Important among them were Sharangdeva's *Sangit Ratnakara*, Jagadevamalla's *Sangit Chudamani* (1138-1150), Jain King Parsvadeva's *Sangitsamaysar* (1134-1145) and Haripaldeva's *Sangit Sudhakar* (1248). The Mahanubhav and *Varkami* devotional songs of the era also provide a glimpse of the rich musical culture of the era. Most of the works mentioned above are scholarly works rendered with scientific care which indicate a highly advanced musical heritage.

In the Varkari cult which began early in 11th century, music was an essential part of daily life and the numerous musical forms mentioned in *Varkari* literature exist and are in practice in Maharashtra even today. These are *Pad*, *Virahini*, *Kheliya*, *Abhang*, *Ovi*, *Bharud*, *Keertana*, *Aarati*, *Palana* and *Bhupali*. Sant Namdeo (1270-1350) whose compositions are adopted in the Sikh Holy book *Granthasaheb*, refers to the singing of *khayal* before emergence of Amir Khusro



though this *khayal* was different from what it was understood in the later period. But this also signalled the beginning of the new forms emerging out of cultural interaction with the Muslims.

### Muslim Musicians

From the 13th century onward, the influence of Muslim culture, particularly the Sufi music started manifesting in Maharashtra. Haripaldeva's *Sangit Sudhakara* for the first time makes a distinction between Hindustani and Karnataka music schools which clearly sets apart the Hindustani music as the one influenced by the Muslim culture. Ibrahim Adil Shah II of Bijapur (1580-1626) (a segment of Bahamani dynasty), who had a close cultural affinity with Maharashtra and honoured Marathi as his court language, wrote an anthology of 59 compositions in seventeen ragas, *Kitab-I-Nauras*. He had keen interest in music and was the first king to get pictorial motifs associated with certain ragas painted in his book.

Tukaram's *abhangs* were written during Shivaji's era. The secular and manly musical form in the name of *powada* also came to be acknowledged during this period. The *powada* singers mainly told stories of heroic deeds of their heroes in inspiring rhythm and language. Generally, during the Maratha period both classical and non-classical varieties of music flourished. Maratha chieftains of the Peshwas such as Shinde Gaekwad, Holkar, Patwardhan Raste, etc. employed vocal artistes in their courts. Shivaji's grandson Shahu (1682-1749) employed musicians, actors, bards and dancing girls in his court. Apart from *powada*, another musical form which sometimes verged on semi-classical—established itself during the Maratha period. That was *lavani*, a romantic form accompanied with dance and repartees between two parties. *Lavani* flourished during the Peshwa rule and retained its glory till recent times.

In short, the Shivaji era witnessed deepening of devotional music and emergence of inspiring martial forms like *powada*. During the Peshwa period, the popular music such as *lavani* assumed a vital form. The early English rule saw a revolutionary development when committed artistes by design enlarged the scope of classical music and endeavoured to popularise it among the commoners. Successful efforts were made to switch over from the limited patronage of princes, kings and the aristocracy to the music lovers among the general masses.

A new popular variety of theatre music and later film music emerged which drew the masses towards semi-classical music. Indeed it was the theatre music and its legendary exponents such as Narayan Rajhans alias 'Balgandharva' which took the semi-classical popular music to the middle class and lower middle class home from where emerged the robust and dynamic breed of modern students and exponents of classical *Hindustani* music. This era also saw scientific research and institutionalised training in classical and light music. Training classes, music circles, institutions spread all through Maharashtra. Efforts were also made by the Marathi exponents and teachers to integrate the different classical nuances of different regions in consonance with the nationalist fervour sweeping the country.

### Musical Renaissance

This new vibrant musical era was initiated by Balkrishnabuwa Ichalkaranjekar who started the music classes in Mumbai around 1880. The monumental pioneering work of fundamental nature in consolidating and propagating Indian classical music throughout India systematically was done by Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande (1860 to 1937) and Pandit Vishnu Digambar Paluskar (1872 to 1931). Bhatkhande concentrated on

spreading systematic education of music and creating a fundamental literature on classical music. His music literature is unparalleled in India in respect of its variety, fundamental theories and logic. He published 18 important musicological works by 1921 in Marathi, Sanskrit and English. He also prepared textbooks on music. His contribution to theoretical exposition, notation, and music education is considered to be revolutionary in the annals of modern Indian music.

The credit of consolidating and stabilising the musical upsurge in the subcontinent is given to Paluskar. An acknowledged vocalist of great calibre, Paluskar threw himself in propagation of music and organisation and institutionalisation of musical activities all through the sub-continent with a missionary zeal. He toured the length and breadth of India, Burma and Sri Lanka, gave concerts and organised concerts for young talented singers, mobilised patronage from princes and masses alike, innovated novel methods such as *jalasas*, seminars and conferences to create awareness and interest among common people, gave dignity to performing artistes, set up schools, colleges and musical circles, *gayan mandalis* of the connoisseurs. He discarded traditional taboos of *gharana* nuances. Paluskar was a musical entrepreneur who opened new lines of action in music performance to bring music to the forefront. Paluskar was also a sort of rebel or a deviationist reformer, as scholar Dr. Ashok D. Ranade describes him. Many prominent music exponents and scholars assert that if Indian classical music has earned high prestige and following among the elites and the commoners today, the credit goes to Paluskar's imaginative and missionary efforts.

All through this renaissance, it must be emphasised that music has remained a secular art form in Maharashtra (as elsewhere in India) despite the fact that the vocal content of the Indian classical music has largely been devotional. A

list of court appointed artistes and temple artistes in Maharashtra bears this fact. For example, Satara court had Nazar Ali Khan and Varas Ali as official performers. Jat state had Alidat Khan. Kolhapur—Mugal Khan, Rajab Ali Khan, Alladiya Khan (who acquired great reputation through India) and Haidar Khan, Kurundwad—Ustad Rahimat Khan. Abdul Karim Khan, Rahimat Khan and Alladiya Khan, the legendary vocalists, have a vast number of disciples spread in Maharashtra. Ustad Nazir Ali Khan created a distinct school of music which is now known as Bhendibazar (the locality where he stayed in Mumbai) *Gharana*.

A description of Maharashtra's musical culture cannot be complete without mentioning the legendary giants of the contemporary world both in popular light music and classical music who have enthralled the people of India and the sub-continent. The Mangeshkar sisters Lata and Asha have acquired global fame. No less formidable are their kins Usha and Hridaynath. An annual 15-day festival of classical music in Pune named after Sawai Gandharva attracts almost all the senior exponents of music from all over India. Kumar Gandharva, Bhimsen Joshi, Kishori Amonkar have become legends in their life time.

### Theatre in Maharashtra

Theatre is passion of Maharashtra. Theatre is a movement and it is in the blood of the middle class Maharashtra. If anywhere in India the commercial theatre and art theatre are alive and kicking, it is in Maharashtra. In Mumbai and Pune, plays are staged every day—some times three performances a day—in over a dozen of theatres. Elsewhere in urban places such as Kolhapur, Sangli, Aurangabad, Nagpur or Nasik, experimental theatre groups thrive and perform. On the day a much hyped India-Pakistan cricket one-day match was to be played, a popular director

scheduled three shows of his play in three shifts in a theatre in cricket-loving Mumbai. All the three shows went house full. That shows the typical Maharashtrian's passion for this form of entertainment.

During the state-sponsored annual drama competition nearly 1000 plays are staged by amateur groups at various centres in Maharashtra. At least one-fourth of these scripts are newly written by aspiring young playwrights. And then there are other drama competitions galore—city and district level school and college competitions, workers' theatre competitions, individual shields and cups named after prominent theatre personalities and so on. Vibrant theatre activities are on in all parts of the state throughout the year.

Maharashtra has a long tradition of folk theatre staged in the open in villages, town squares, school grounds or temples. These forms accompanied by music, dancing, dialogues and extempore skits were known as *khele*, *tamasha*, *bharud*, *keertan* and *yakshagan*, the latter originating in Karnataka and practiced in the contiguous areas in the state. The Marathi theatre, as it is known today, was born 160 years ago, on November 5, 1843, when Vishnudas Bhave, employee of a minor princely state of Sangli, presented the story of *Sita Swayamvar* in the form of a play in a local temple. Bhave obviously borrowed ideas from various folk forms as also from Sanskrit and English plays with which he was familiar. His was a step forward from the folk *tamasha* or *keertan* in a way because his play had a complete consistent story, short scenes, a number of actors acting different parts, written script and dialogues and songs to take the story forward. The play became immensely popular and Bhave toured around Maharashtra with his group of actors. The response of the audiences was tremendous. Many more such plays followed and a number of theatre groups emerged.

However, Bhave's endeavour was rather raw lacking

the artistic sophistication both in script and performance. It took nearly 40 years for another step forward. In 1880 the legendary playwright Annasaheb Kirloskar adapted Kalidasa's great Sanskrit epic *Abhidnyana Shakuntalam* into Marathi *Shakuntal*. The secret of Kirloskar's overwhelming success lay in his skill of adaptation, his idea of transforming the ancient ambience of the original Sanskrit into the modern Marathi middle class atmosphere, culture, moral character and language and the songs that he tuned to sophisticated semi-classical music. The songs were rendered by very competent singer-actors. *Shakuntal* set a pattern of 'musical plays' that was to dominate Marathi theatre for more than five decades. Unlike the western concept of opera, music was not at the core of the play. It was incidental, sometimes redundant, and yet had its overbearing charm adding to the entertainment value of the play greatly. A whole lot of playwrights followed in the footsteps of Kirloskar and accomplished actors and singers joined the *natak mandalis*.

### Balgandharva

The form produced a great iconic singer named Narayan Rajhans who was conferred with a title of 'Balgandharva' by Tilak himself. 'Balgandharva' mostly acted female roles. But apart from his prodigious singing genius, such was his sedate charm, grace, sophistication and demeanour in the female roles that it set the whole Maharashtra ablaze. 'Balgandharva' set the fashion in female attire, the nuances in draping the nine-yard saree, the hair style, the jewellery, the style and tonal quality of expressions and so on. Even today in the 21st century many old-fashioned middle class homes in Maharashtra display on their walls the portrait of 'Balgandharva' in female attire.

A number of playwrights like Deval, Khadilkar, Gadkari, Kolhatkar ably followed the pattern set by

Kirloskar. Apart from 'Balgandharva' great singers like Deenanath Mangeshkar (Father of Lata and Asha), Keshavrao Bhosale and Bhaurao Kolhatkar further enhanced the class and entertainment quality of the musical plays. It was in this era that 'natya-sangit' came to be known as a separate form of music. In Maharashtra, a cultured middle class family is supposed to be a regular theatre goer and passionate devotee of the 'natya-sangit'. Despite the advent of *avant garde* plays and changing patterns of the modern Marathi theatre, the middle class Maharashtra has to a large extent retained its craze for the old-style 'natya-sangit'. This was the golden age of Marathi theatre. Great plays were written by great writers. Theatre groups prospered and toured all over Maharashtra.

Great singers and actors added to the charm and glory of the stage. Not to be outdone, accomplished painters and artistes came forward to lend their hand by creating magnificent drapes, curtains and costumes.

While this peculiar genre of musical theatre held its sway between 1880 and 1940, a weak prose theatre did exist mostly inspired by the theatre in the West, particularly by Shakespeare whose plays were adapted and staged in large numbers. The prose theatre had its own audience but did not have the magic of the musical theatre to pull the common theatre lovers. It needs to be mentioned here that emergence of Bhave, the first playwright, and the modern theatre coincides with the intellectual renaissance of the early English rule. And though Sangli was a far off place from Bombay in those times, the princely state was ruled by a progressive Brahmin who encouraged arts, music and English education. Kirloskar emerged on the scene when Tilak was about to start his newspaper and new ripples of nationalistic fervour had begun to stir the middle class Maharashtra. Though the themes of these plays were based on stories from the great epics, some of the playwrights

skillfully used these themes as allegories to criticise the injustices of the colonial rule. Serious social themes such as child marriage and evils of alcohol drinking were also undertaken. The entertainment industry was trying to keep pace, albeit haltingly, with the social and political turbulence around.

The advent of cinema in 1920s pushed the Marathi theatre into a crisis of survival. Many great theatre talents were lured by the powerful medium. And though the musical plays continued to attract audiences, their glory had faded. By 1930s the golden age of the Marathi theatre had come to an end. The early Marathi film industry made a pioneering contribution to the Indian cinema; but it sapped the strength of the Marathi theatre and threw it in a twilight zone. Younger playwrights like Rangnekar, Warerkar, Pendharkar and Atre tried to hold the theatre aloft during this period with some success. But they could hardly recapture the glory of the golden age. Also, barring some exceptions, Marathi theatre of this period seems to have lost not only its old élan but also its political and social sensitivities. The freedom movement heading towards the climax, the second world war, the social and ideological debates, emergence of the left movement—all this turbulence barely had any echoes in the contemporary Marathi theatre.

### The New Theatre

The lull continued till after independence and the Marathi theatre awoke Rip Van Winkle—like from a long slumber in the 1950s with a new breed of realistic playwrights and creative directors coming to the fore. They radicalised the concept of theatre completely so far as Marathi scene was concerned. It revived the enthusiasm for the theatre among the Marathi middle classes. Not that the theatre had died during the intervening period. Shows were being run determinedly and audiences patronised generously.

However, the spirit of the theatre and experimentation was missing. The new playwrights and artistes changed all that. Naturally, this rejuvenation hardly had any roots in Marathi theatre's golden past. It was not a gradual evolution but a sudden jump into the modern era to meet the challenges of the new age post-World War II challenges.

When the new theatre burst on the scene, it manifested at three different critical levels. One was the experimental *avant garde* form borrowed directly from the absurd theatre of Europe and much acclaimed by the radical elites of the day. The other was the modern theatre portraying the brutal realities of human existence and social life. The third was a weak thematic continuation of the romantic drama of the past but entirely in the prose form. This latter type sated the thirst of the theatre-loving mainstream in Maharashtra. However, there is no want of audiences for any of these categories. An attempt was made by Director Jabbar Patel to introduce Brechtian musical plays to the Marathi theatre. Unlike the popular musicals plays of the 'golden age', music was at the core of these plays dynamically enriching the story and presentation. Though Jabbar's productions, including Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal* became instant successes with the masses, the elites and the critics, these failed to set a trend in Marathi, probably because of the costs involved.

Among the prominent playwrights who played a major role in revitalising the Marathi theatre post-independence are Tendulkar, C.T. Khanolkar, Satish Alekar, P.L. Deshpande, Mahesh Elkunchwar, G.P. Deshpande, Purushottam Darvhekar, Jaywant Dalvi and Vasant Kanetkar. The directors who made a significant contribution include Damu Kenkre, Dr. Patel, Vijaya Mehta, Amol Palekar, Arvind Deshpande, Bhalba Kelkar and Sai Paranjpe. Illustrious thespians who charmed the critics and the common audiences alike include among others Dr. Shreeram

Lagoo, Sulabha Deshpande, Vijaya Mehta, Mohan Agashe, Rohini Hattangadi, Madhukar Toradmal etc.

### Marathi Literature

In previous chapters references are made to the origin of Marathi language, the first writings in Prakrit Marathi and contributions of several saint poets in enriching the quality of Marathi even as it shed the sobriquet Prakrit sometime between the 10th and the 12th century. The modern Marathi as it is spoken and written today owes much to the saint poets as also to the scholar poets or 'Pandit Kavi' as they are described now who drew inspiration from the epics and wrote prolific verses in chaste Sanskritised Marathi. Prominent among those whose work is still read are Vaman Pandit (1618-1695), Raghunath Pandit (17th century), Shreedhar (1678-1729) and Moropant (1729-1794).

Note must be taken of the fact that the non-Hindu sects—Christians, Virshaiva (Lingayat), Muslims and Jains—also made a substantial contribution to the Marathi literature from 15th century onward. In fact the European Christian missionaries from the day they arrived in Maharashtra took to Marathi with a remarkable zeal. The first Marathi book printed and published in 1616 (though in Roman script) was *Christ Purana* written by Father Stephens who is greatly respected by the modern scholars of the language. Father Stephens easily adopted the lucid verse style of Jnaneshwar and Eknath to write the story of the Bible in the *ovi* form. Like Jnaneshwar, he frequently extols the beauty, profundity and greatness of Marathi language. There followed many Christian priests who made pioneering contributions to the development of Modern Marathi.

The first Marathi book printed in Devnagari script was Dr. Carey's *Grammar of the Maratha Language*. It was printed at the Baptist Press of Serampore near Calcutta in 1805. Dr. Carey published about a dozen books in Marathi.

It will be redundant to speak of Christian Marathi authors in the modern context now. Because a large number of Christians of Maharashtra have retained their affinity to Marathi and consider it their mother tongue. There are Christian poets, novelists, short-story writers, literary critics and commentators who belong to the mainstream Marathi. In fact, the (East Indian) Christians of Vasai region (north of Mumbai) are considered to be the most ardent sticklers to purity and grammar of the language.

Though the Virshaiva sect mainly flourished in Karnataka, many Virshaivas wrote in Marathi for the adherents of the sect in the language between the 16th and the 17th century. They mainly propounded the tenets of the sect in Marathi verse form. Jains who migrated to North Maharashtra from Rajasthan and Gujarat in the 15th century also wrote prolifically in Marathi mostly on Jain mythology. The local Jains are now completely assimilated and majority of them now happen to be Marathi-speaking.

Similarly, many Muslim saints, poets and scholars have left substantial literature in Marathi from the 15th Century onward as they happened to be Marathi speaking. Hussein Ambarkhan who translated the *Bhagvat Gita* in Marathi is regarded the first prominent Muslim author writing in Marathi in early 17th Century. The most well-known among the Muslim poets of the historic period is Shaikh Mohammad (1560-1650) whose philosophical and spiritual works in the verse form attracted Hindus and Muslims alike. He was the passionate promoter of Hindu-Muslim unity both in spiritual and material life. There have been many contemporary Marathi writers and poets from among the Muslims and they too are part of the mainstream Marathi literary world today.

### Modern Marathi

The career of Marathi as the modern language began with

the consolidation of the British rule after the fall of the Peshwas. There was a flurry of translations in Marathi of books on various sciences and English literature. Early 19th century also witnessed many Grammar studies, encyclopaedic works and dictionaries. After Father Stephens, Dadoba Pandurang Tarkhadkar has been another Grammarian of Marathi who is considered the Panini of Marathi language. Balshastri Jambhekar's first periodical in Marathi in 1832 and many more journals that followed took up for the first time the challenge that Marathi language faced—tackling completely new subjects of science, technology, economy, administration and so on. To these pioneering journalist-scholars goes the credit of voluminously expanding the vocabulary of the language and streamlining its grammar to make the language a modern vehicle of communication. Vishnushastri Chiplunkar, who wrote long essays in his *Nibandhamala*, scoffing at the anglicised people and extolling the greatness of the Indian culture, is considered to have honed the language into a cultured and graceful instrument of communication. Mahatma Phule wrote in the language of the illiterate peasantry and was jeered at by the educated Brahmins.

The first novel in Marathi published in 1857 is Baba Padamji's *Yamuna Paryatan* with widow remarriage as its theme. Padamji was a Christian. The first major novelist of Marathi was Hari Narayan Apte (1864-1919) who is still read and respected. As we have seen, emergence of play predates the novel in Marathi. And though various forms of poetry have a long history in Marathi, Keshavsut alias Krishnaji Keshav Damle (1866-1905) is regarded the father of the modern Marathi poetry. From these beginnings, the Marathi literature has come a long way. Marathi language has spawned poets, novelists, story-writers and playwrights of great stature who created and expanded the readership of serious literature. And though there is a hue and cry that



the powerful electronic media has cast a spell on the people and publishers lament that serious readership is shrinking in India, book publishers seem to be flourishing by and large. In Maharashtra, more than 600 Marathi books are published every year. The circulating libraries in district places and major cities make a good business. Literary activities are galore all round the year.

Among the early modern poets who have left their stamp on the Marathi sensitivities are Rev.N.V.Tilak, Ram Ganesh Gadkari (also a brilliant playwright), Balkavi alias Tryambak Thombre and B.R.Tambe. Among the latter generation, Kusumagraj alias V.V.Shirwadkar, B.B.Borkar, Vinda alias Govind Karandikar, G.D.Madgulkar, C.T.Khanolkar and above all B.S.Mardhekar stand tall and have left a large following. Mention must also be made of some more major modern poets who have enriched the poetry scene. They are Namdeo Dhasal, Arun Kolatkar, Vasant Bapat, Mangesh Padgaonkar, Daya Pawar, Narayan Surve and Dileep Chitre.

The Marathi short story came of age in early fifties, when stalwarts like Gangadhar Gadgil, Arvind Gokhale, Wamn Chorghade, K.J.Purohit and P.B.Bhave explored the changing human sensitivities after the WW to be much enamoured by the post-modern ethos manifesting through abstract and sometimes absurd expressions.

### Novel

Post Hari Narayan Apte, the Marathi novel has made considerable strides from Nathmadhav alias Dwarakanath Pitale's entertaining romanticism set in imagined history, V.M.Joshi and S.V. Ketkar's philosophical and sociological discussions, and N.S.Phadke's magical romance to romanticising history (Ranjit Desai) and eulogising middle class culture. This brief review is meant to indicate only the most important trends and milestones and cannot discuss

the state of literature in details. But a few names and the trends ought to be mentioned. Among the novelists, Phadke (mentioned above), V.S. Khandekar and G.T. Madkholkar formed a troika who ruled the readers' minds till the early 60s. Each of them represented different schools though in essence none of them had a perspective to look beyond the middle class parameters. Those who had that capacity, such as P.Y. Deshpande, B.V. Varerkar, R.V. Dighe, could not evoke much response from elitist critics. Vishram Bedekar's 'Ranangan' did make a feeble attempt to break this shell (and he was acclaimed much by the critics, for different reasons though). Bedekar did not follow his own initiative and preferred to employ his talents elsewhere. After Bedekar, it was only in the 60s that the Marathi novel begun to show some reluctant awareness of the larger human and social reality. But only that. A comprehensive holistic approach towards human life as a continuum within the vast spread of the universe is barely evident here. And yet, the novel form in Marathi has flourished and today it offers a rich and variegated fare.

After the Phadke, Khandekar, Madkholkar triumvirate, the names that matter in the world of modern Marathi novel are S.N. Pendse, Vyankatesh Madgulkar, C.T. Khanolkar (again), Bhau Padhye, Jaywant Dalwi, D.B.Mokashi and Bhalchandra Nemade. Nemade's *Kosala* set the literary world ablaze as it completely changed the thematic content and the narration style of the novel. More important than that, he liberated the novel from the narrow Brahministic sensitivities, ethos, cultural nuances and language. Till then an overwhelming number of novelists were Brahmins. Nemade himself could not follow this lead nor could his large number of followers in respect of the modern thematic content of *Kosala*. From the decade of 70's Marathi novel is becoming progressively mature and yet none of the novelists has really burst on the national scene for various reasons.

### Dalit Literature

Any review of modern Marathi literature cannot be complete without acknowledging the significant contribution made by the 'dalit literature' movement which flowered between 1965 and 1980s. The new generation of dalit youths born at the time of independence was coming of age by the seventies'. That was almost the first literate generation of the former untouchable Mahars. The youths brought up under Ambedkar's teaching discovered to their dismay that mere education did not bring social equality nor economic justice. Their frustrations first rebelliously manifested in poetry and then prose.

'Dalit Literature' as it is now known revolutionised the very core of the Marathi literature enriching it with completely new sensibilities, new imageries and with a powerful new vocabulary. By bringing in the everyday experiences of the oppressed, the deprived and the unempowered people, hitherto unknown to the language, dalit literature truly freed the stagnant pool of Marathi literature bounded by the middle class Brahmin sensibilities, experiences and vocabulary. It was this dalit literature of the rebellious youth which gave birth to the 'Dalit Panthers' movement which created sensation in the political field for a brief period of a decade or so.

The trail blazers of this vibrant school were Namdeo Dhasal, whose path-breaking poetry is now proudly claimed by the mainstream Marathi literature as its own. Raja Dhale, another rebel poet of the little magazine movement, Daya Pawar, a sober poet whose work gently but poignantly articulates the profound sorrow and pain of the dalit life, Baburao Bagul, a sharp story teller whose devastating stories captured the agony and indignities of dalit life in heart-wrenching details. Annabhau Sath, another capable dalit story writer preceded the dalit movement and had

influenced the next generation greatly. Marathi dalit literature, which spawned similar writing in other Indian languages, was a big jolt to the established literary norms and critical parameters. Thirty years after the upsurge of the dalit literature movement, its rebellious fire has dimmed and force receded. It has now become part of the mainstream literature in the process hugely enriching the latter.

### Crafts, Painting and Sculpture

As repeatedly pointed out in earlier chapters, from ancient times Maharashtra has been a meeting ground for diverse cultural, political and social winds coming from all directions. Maharashtra has been generously receptive to these influences developing an assimilative culture. This assimilative character is most evident in the field of arts and crafts. And yet, Maharashtra has created many indigenous cultural expressions and styles that have on them a distinct stamp of the people, the soil and the local traditions.

A visit to any museum in Maharashtra displaying the works of traditional craftsmen from ancient times reveals a rich heritage of fine craftsmanship. The Raja Kelkar Museum of Pune, the product of life-long dedication of one man almost without any resources, reveals in all the glory the artistic genius of craftsmen of Maharashtra in beautifying each and every thing in daily household use. From the metal or wooden skin scrubber (*vajri*) for the toilet room intricately carved and exotically shaped to the beetle-nut cracker made of brass, silver or copper in amusing shapes and sensuous motifs with pearl-sized tiny bells attached to it peeling sweet music at each movement of the instrument; from finely carved wooden pillars to elegant *samai* (slim and tall oil lamps), everything is touched with a craftsman's creative hand.

The Kelkar museum is a veritable treasury of Maharashtra's craft. It has acquired and preserved the

beautiful remnants of the famous Mastani Mahal as also the carved doors and pillars of Sardar Nipani's mansion. Apart from the various shapes of *samai*, it also has samples of different kinds of lamps in use—carved metal lamps of various shapes, *laman diva*, *dhupdan*, kitchen vessels for cooking and serving food, the ornate swings and the full paraphernalia of a classic *paandaan* or a beautifully carved plate containing covered ornate bowls for different ingredients for making a *paan*. Obviously, these vessels and utensils were in use in the mansions and *wadas* of the wealthy and the powerful.

In historic mansions or *wadas* of pre-Mogul, Mogul and Peshwa period, one finds numerous wall paintings and miniatures of different styles as also carved wooden pillars, arches and doors. Many of the ornate *wadas* of the sardars of the Peshwa regime have intricate wall paintings in them. These murals in Nana Phadnavis' typical wada in Menawali and others at Wai, Nasik, Chandwad and Pune reveal an influence of the Deccani style of Golkonda and Bijapur. And yet they manifest a distinct Marathi character. So are the carved pillars, painted ceilings and sculpted fountains in these *wadas*.

### Finest Sculptures

Thus the rock-cut architecture which may have originated elsewhere finds its finest expression in the Ellora caves near Aurangabad. No other work of murals or wall paintings equals the numerous wall-paintings of Ajanta in their beauty, artistic aesthetics and also the meticulous details with which they portray the life of the contemporary commoners and the royalty. The Ajanta wall paintings are considered the earliest example of the traditional mural art in India. The Kailas temple of Ellora is the unique example of the intricate architecture cut from a single rock from top to bottom. No wonder Ajanta and Ellora are invariably on the itinerary of

discerning art lovers. The *Trimurti* sculpture of the Elephanta caves near Mumbai is also unique for its size elegance and mystical grandeur.

As skilled as the sculptors and painters of Ajanta, Ellora and Elephanta were the little craftsmen of Maharashtra who produced fine pottery from ancient period—metal work, textiles, stone and wood carvings, leather work and exotic textile prints. The *kolhapuri chappal*, known for its elegance and sturdiness has found markets abroad. Maharashtrian saris, made whether in Nagpur, Narayangaon or Nanded have distinctive styles. The most notable is the *Paithani* traditionally produced at Paithan near Aurangabad. Many ancient towns of Maharashtra such as Gondia, Khamgaon, Nasik, Paithan were known for excellent workmanship in producing vessels made of copper, brass, kasha and bronze as also fine gold and silver jewellery. With urbanisation and mass production techniques, these ancient crafts are vanishing. The state government has extended help in preserving some of the finest crafts such as manufacturing the *kolhapuri* leather *chappals* and the *Paithani*.

With the advent of the industrial mass production of many household utilities and the textile mills, the traditional crafts have been vanishing. Attempts are being made by the state to preserve and promote these crafts by supporting the skilled craftsmen and artists.

### Modern Era

The modern painting and sculpture was introduced by the British in Maharashtra. By 1857, the first university in Mumbai was in place and there followed establishment of many academic institutions. At the suggestion and generous donation by Sir Jamsetji Jijibhoy and Nana Shankarseth, the Governor of Bombay Presidency, Lord Falkland, established the first school of art in Mumbai in 1857. It was named 'Sir J.J. School of Art and Industry'. The school soon

acquired a reputation and its students established similar institutions in Maharashtra and elsewhere in India. The Calcutta School of Art had created a dynamic movement of reviving the Indian style of painting under the leadership of its principal Havell and another famous artist of India, Avanimdranath Tagore. Cecil Berns of the Bombay school promptly followed the lead. Besides reviving the typical Indian styles of painting and drawing, attempts were made to blend the Indian and the European styles with great success.

The artists of the J.J.School have made a profound impact on the world of modern painting and sculpture in India. They established the 'Bombay Arts Society' in 1888 to encourage and promote new talents and started holding regular exhibitions of their creations. Since then for over a century these exhibitions have become an annual event eagerly looked forward by the art lovers and the budding artists. In the late 19th and early 20th century Bombay came to be regarded as the *mecca* of the artistes. So enamoured was Raja Ravi Verma by the cultural ambience of Bombay that he made the city his home. It is interesting to note that the women in his paintings invariably appear in the classical nine-yard Maharashtrian sari.

The artists who acquired fame in the early days of the school were Abalal Rehman, Satavalekar, Pestonji Bomanji, Dhurandhar, Trinidad, Taskar, Bhosule, Agaskar, Chudekar and Muller. Their works were generously appreciated by the British and European art critics. Under the influence of this institution, the art of painting and drawing became a part of the school curricula in the region. The new trend in modern water colour painting was set by Madhavrao Parandekar and S.L. Haldankar drawing inspiration from the school principal Cecil Berns. Its influence spread far and wide and many artistes, particularly in Kolhapur, developed an independent style of their own. Prominent among them

were Chandrakant Mandhare, Baburao Painter and Ganpatrao Wadgekar. Similarly sculptors like Shamrao Mhatre, Talim Goregaonkar, Phadke and Karmarkar created a new upsurge in this ancient art of India. Ganpatrao Mhatre's exquisite life-size sculpture, "On way to the temple", won many national and international accolades. It now adorns the foyer of the J.J. School and attracts art lovers and students of sculpture from all over India.

The alumni of the school, painters, sculptors, architects and photographers, founded another institution in 1918, the Art Society of India, with the objective of promotion and development of art in all its manifestations. The Bombay Art Society and The Art Society of India together have enhanced the standard of the Indian art. Both institutions hold exhibitions and confer honours to encourage budding artists. Along with Shantiniketan and Kolkata, Mumbai has remained a dynamic centre of art movement largely because of these two institutions and the traditions set by the J.J. School.

Prominent artistes of the region started new experimentation after 1934 by discarding the orthodox traditional styles to search new ways to give expression to new ideas and changing sensibilities of the modern world. Among them were three well-known artists of Indore—N.S.Bendre, G.M.Solegaonkar and D.J.Joshi. Bendre and Solegaonkar later acquired international fame. The art scene could not remain isolated from the convulsions of the World War and the freedom movement. Several artists came to the fore to infuse new contents in the creations. The first was the 'Young Turks Group' set up in 1940 under the leadership of P.T.Reddy. However, after Reddy plunged into the freedom movement, the group became inactive.

The other group, 'Progressive Artists' Group' was founded in 1947 by K.H.Ara, Newton Souza, Raza and sculptor Sadanand Bakre. Later M.F.Hussein and Gade also

joined the group which created a sensation by publishing a radical manifesto. Its objective was to make the artistes receptive to the socio-political forces around and take art closer to reality and closer to the common people. The group not only radicalised the Indian painting styles, the contents of the creations and the response it evoked from the people, it made an impact on the international art scene. In India, the group set new trends and changed the whole concept of art. Gaitonde, Kishan Khanna, Samant, Hazarnavis and Raiba also joined the group which continued its activities with vigour and dedication. The group became inactive by 1953 as many of its members went abroad or elsewhere. But by that time The Progressive Artists' Group had given a new dimension to the Indian art.

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## PLACES OF INTEREST

Maharashtra may not have historic architectural marvels like in the North nor the magnificent temple edifices in the South. The architectural frugality of the land is said to be the consequence of insecurity and uncertainty during the period when the Marathas were on the rise. But this shortcoming is amply compensated for by numerous other attractions which ensnare tourists, students of architecture, history buffs, lovers of nature as also scholars of sociology and archaeology.

Rough and rugged magnificent forts, strong and proud, perched breathtakingly on cliffs and plateaus, unique sea-forts almost floating on the ocean waves, wild-life sanctuaries amidst thick jungles, verdant hills and trekking routes, pristine unspoilt beaches, scenic hill stations, carved temples in caves of rock and reputed socio-cultural institutions are among the attractions that have been pulling curious people to Maharashtra for a long time. It has a peculiar temple architecture of its own, influenced by the North South and the East. And if lavish and sprawling mansions of historic nobility are hardly noticeable, there are peculiar *wadas* with exquisitely carved doors, pillars and furniture, wall paintings and the layout architecture which is unique to Maharashtra. Such *wadas* built by the nobility of Peshwa regime or aristocrats in other regimes are found in almost every town of Maharashtra, particularly in Pune, Nasik, Satara, Sangli, Kolhapur, Nagpur and Alibag.

### The Mountain Forts

The mountain forts which dot the Sahyadri ranges and branches of Satpuda too are unique to Maharashtra in so far as their location and architecture is concerned. Many of them are built in ancient times with their history lost in the hoary past. The remarkable aspect of the mountain forts of Maharashtra is their apparent inaccessibility, an imperative of the war strategies of the era when they were built. Of course, in recent decades, major forts are made easily accessible by roads. The view from atop the forts is usually breathtaking and awe-inspiring. There are fort roamers' associations, climbing clubs, fort lovers clubs of the elderly and so on who conduct some or the other activity in relation to these forts all round the year.

Notable among about 350 forts which attract large number of visitors are **Devgiri** or **Daulatabad** near Aurangabad known for its impregnable defences, **Simhagad**, **Purandhar**, **Lohagad** and **Rajgad**—all four in the vicinity of Pune and not very far from Mumbai; the mighty **Raigad** hidden in thick jungles, surrounded by awesome high hills and built on a massive rock-like spur. Shivaji coroneted himself atop this fort and made it his capital; **Gavilgad** in Amravati district is also a great attraction because it is a good hill station surrounded by thick green forests and is in the vicinity of one of the most beautiful tiger sanctuaries of **Kolkhas**; **Fort Shivneri** near Nasik where Shivaji was born; **Pratapgad** near Satara; and the coastal forts of **Sindhudurg**, **Vijaydurg**, **Alibag** and **Murud-Janjira** as also **Vasai** near Mumbai built in the 16th century by the Portuguese. Many of these edifices are associated with the romantic history of Shivaji's famous guerrilla campaigns.

**Deogiri**, one of the best preserved forts of the middle ages, is described as a 'superb example of almost copybook perfection of military architecture'. Built on an isolated hill, the citadel stands at the centre of three concentric defence

walls. The construction of the fort began during the Rashtrakuta period and was carried over by the Yadavas of the 12th century. Most notable are its covered zig-zag paths leading to the citadel which have many contrivances to confuse the unwanted intruder. The fort was impregnable till Alladdin's forces captured it by treacherous means in the 13th century from the Yadavas.

**Simhagad**, visible from Pune city like a formidable rock, is associated with the story of legendary Mavala soldier Tanaji who breached its defences by climbing an unfortified sheer cliff to capture it from the Mogul control. Tanaji laid his life in the battle and the cliff is named after him. The fort earlier called **Kondhana** was renamed by Shivaji as **Simhagad**. Shivaji was adept at giving romantic names to forts which captured the minds of the people. Apart from **Simhagad** (lion fort), among others he named or renamed were **Pratapgad** (fort of brave deeds), **Rajgad** (king's fort), **Vishalgad** and **Prachandgad** (sprawling and massive), **Lohagad** (fort of steel), **Sajjangad** (fort of the saint), **Vyavahargad** (practical), **Vishramgad** (rest), **Sindhudurg** (ocean) and **Vijaydurg** (victory).

A number of forts were built by Shivaji to protect perimeters of his swaraj from the invaders. Among these strategically formidable forts which reveal Shivaji's military genius most notable are supposed to be **Pratapgad** close to **Mahabaleshwar** and **Rajgad**. The coastal forts built by him **Sindhudurg** and **Vijaydurg** stand testimony to his concern for coastal defence of his 'swaraj'. Among the many contemporary rulers in India and those that preceded and followed him, Shivaji was the only one to have a vision of developing his own naval fleet. Shivaji constructed a chain of 16 major coastal forts and many more minor bastions to provide strong naval bases for the navy he was raising.



### Temples and places of pilgrimage

The temple architecture here also displays the mixed influences from the North, South and the East. The Gujarat and Malwa influence is visible in some temples on the Northern periphery while the influence of Eastern temple architecture can be seen in the vicinity of Nagpur. The southern strain is evident all over. Another notable feature is that Maharashtra does not have monumental temple complexes like those in the South, North and East. Maharashtra temples are comparatively small edifices some of them almost like mini castles or fortresses, again an impact of the uncertainties of several centuries.

Hemadri, a general of the Yadavas, had developed a style of constructing temples of finely cut stones without using lime or any other cementing material. Hence the *Hemadpanti* style temples which are found throughout Maharashtra. A remarkable feature of typically Marathi temples is the *deepmala* or the lamp pillar, a tall tree-like structure made of stones with brackets protruding from all sides from top to bottom to hold oil lamps. On festive occasions or holy days, these lamps are lit presenting a beautiful spectacle.

### Vithoba of Pandharpur

The greatest place of pilgrimage for Maharashtrians is the Lord Vithoba temple at Pandharpur in South Maharashtra where millions congregate each year on the 11th day of the month of *Ashadh* as per Hindu almanac to the tumultuous chant of *vitthala-vitthala* and *Dnyanoba-Tukaram*. A large number of them trek their way on foot from all corners of Maharashtra to meet here on that day on the banks of river Chandrabhaga to a veritable feast of *bhajans* and *kirtans*. When they go trekking in processions carrying colourful pennants dancing and singing *bhajans* to the beat of *tals* and *mridangs*, it is called *dindi* or *wari*.

The two most important *dindis* begin from Alandi and Dehu carrying *padukas* or wooden sandals of Jnaneshwar and Tukaram respectively. These two *dindis* meet at Pune and then proceed further to Pandharpur, over 200 kms away. Pandharpur is a seat of the *Warkari sampradaya*. The tradition of *dindis* had begun long before the time of Jnaneshwar. Though it is the peasants who make the trek in overwhelming numbers, others including Brahmins, scholars, pandits, researchers also join the *dindis* in large numbers. Vithoba is almost a secular God. An average Maharashtrian has a great emotional and spiritual attachment to him. Even the Christian missionaries of early period have recorded their awe and admiration at the deep emotions Vitthala aroused in the heart of a Marathi peasant. Jains claim the Vitthala to be their own Neminath, Buddhist their Avalokiteshwara and some others the Sun. There are numerous Muslim devotees who participate in the *dindis* and scholars who study the saint literature.

Abode of Vitthala or Lord Vishnu, the temple is very ancient, its original builder unknown. It has been renovated several times by Shaliwahanas of the 1st century, Rashtrakutas in the 6th century and later the Yadavas of the 13th century. The glistening black stone idols of Vitthala and his wife Rukhmini are in standing position with their arms akimbo. The story is that a bhakta, Pundalik, was busy serving his parents when Lord himself appeared to visit him. Pundalik was so devoted to parents that he did not like being disturbed. He threw a brick out and asked Vitthala-Rukhmini to stand on it and wait. Vithoba stands there ever since waiting for his *bhakta*. The temple is a neat and tidy affair exuding not glory or opulence but just the humbling power of *bhakti*.

On the great day of Ashadh, Pandharpur presents the spectacle of what is called *bhakti-kallol* with thousands of *dindis* singing and dancing and drinking in the *bhakti-rasa*.

The river is either in spate or full of water during the season and a number of small beautiful temples on the sands of the bank are half-immersed. *Warkari Sampradaya* and the *Wari* indeed represent the quintessential culture of Maharashtra. Many observers and students join the *dindis* just to study this phenomenon. Pandharpur is 74 km from Sholapur and is approachable by rail and road.

### Khandoba of Jejuri

Another folk God of Maharashtra popular among the peasants and the elites alike is the Khandoba of Jejuri close to Pune. Khandoba is Lord Shiva and his wife Mhalsai is Parvati. The significance of Khandoba is that it has been an ancient deity of the tribal populations of the past which has been co-opted by the Aryans by making him an incarnation of Shankara. It is a God most popular among Dhargar (shepherd) community and many nomadic tribes and is a family deity of even Brahmins. During the *yatra* days Jejuri becomes a vast veritable exhibition ground of customs and rituals carried on from the hoary past by various castes, sub-castes and tribes.

The *Jat Panchayats* or the traditional governing bodies of many castes and sub-castes meet during these days to deliberate the caste matters and make important decisions in cases such as marriage and divorce, abduction, elopement, adultery, theft, breach of agreements and even murder. Many social organisations and the Government do not approve of the court-like proceedings and the system of caste justice and they have tried to stop the tradition. But the *Jat Panchayats* go on meeting annually as if to announce or underscore the invincibility of the Indian caste system. On these days lambs, goats, sheep and hens used to be sacrificed in thousands when the surrounding grounds became full of blood rivulets. The government has banned these mass sacrifices with some success.

No wonder Jejuri attracts the attention of sociologists. The complexities of castes, sub-castes, their specific traditions and rituals, methods of animal sacrifice, the caste courts, the music, the dances, the sartorial and culinary cultures of each caste and sub-caste which are on display here are so mind-boggling that generations of scholars have spent their lives in studying the phenomenon. The pilgrimage days last for five days each in April, January and February as also on any no moon day which happens to be a Sunday. Between one and two lakh people gather at Jejuri on any such *yatra* occasion. Like Lord Krishna, many romantic stories and brave deeds are associated with Khandoba. Khandoba again is a secular deity. A folklore suggests that his beloved whom he married later was a Muslim girl.

The temple of Khandoba on the plateau of a hillock is striking. Broad steps flanked by tall deepamalas lead to the temple complex which has tall minarets and chhatris around the corners. In the courtyard is a big tortoise made of brass plate. Here the pilgrims fling the turmeric powers (termed Bhandara) and vigorous chant in chorus, "yelko, yelkot, khandobacha yelkot".

The present temple structure was constructed as recently as 1608 by a local Maratha satrap. Ahilyabai Holkar added many rooms to the complex. The pillars, battlements and the adjoining tank were constructed by Tukoji Holkar by 1770.

### The Goddesses

Every family in Maharashtra has its own deity, kuladevata or kulaswamini. There are three and half *Shaktipeethas* of 'sovereign' goddesses in Maharashtra. These are in the order of seniority Renuka of Mahoor near Yavatmal, Bhavani of Tulzapur near Sholapur, Mahalaxmi (or Amba) of Kolhapur. The half *peetha* is considered to be Saptashringi of Wanti near Nasik. Devout Maharashtrians, from Brahmins to the

'lowliest' of castes are supposed to make a pilgrimage to these *peethas* to consecrate a family occasions such as birth, marriage and so on. To fulfil one's wishes men and women invoke their family Goddess and take a vow to renounce something or the other (part of food or clothes) or take a physically painful penance till their wish is begotten. This is called *Navas*. Thousands of families flock to the temples of these Goddesses every day to perform *puja* to express gratitude on fulfilment of their *navas*.

**Bhavani** of Tulzapur is mother Goddess of Maharashtra. Shivaji had great faith in Bhavani and visited the temple several times in his life. Tulzapur is in Usmanabad district of Marathawada and is very close to Sholapur. The temple, strategically located and enclosed by hills on three sides is surrounded by strong and tall protective walls. The temple proper made of heavy stones can be an architect's delight as it manifests a synthesis of many schools, particularly Southern Hindu and the Islamic architectural styles. As a consequence, it seems to have achieved its own local style.

The temples of **Renuka** of Mahoor and **Saptashringi** of Wani are on high hillocks. The size of the **Saptashringi** idol is amazing. **Mahalaxmi** of Kolhapur is among the ancient deities mentioned in the oldest *puranas* and even the Jain texts. She is invoked at the beginning of most folk rituals across Maharashtra with the chant of *udey, udey ge Ambe....* The temple in the heart of the city was built probably during the rule of Silaharas around the 8th century. It was destroyed by some fanatic Muslim ruler and was rebuilt by Sambhaji, Shivaji's son in the 17th century. Apart from the hereditary priests who trace their lineage from ancient times, each of these Goddesses has a set of attendant communities who serve the deity in various ways from a distance—*Gondhali, Bhute, Bhope* etc.. They use peculiar musical instruments to play before the Goddess.

### Jyotirlinga

Of the twelve *Jyotirlingas* or the seats of Lord Shankara in the country which are deeply revered by devout Hindus, five are found in Maharashtra: **Tryambakeshwar, Bheema-Shankar, Parali-Vaijnath, Aundhya-Nagnath and Ghrushneswar**. The holy pilgrimage places are also known for scenic surroundings. Devotees of Lord Shiva flock to these sites from all over India. Of these **Tryambakeshwar** close to Nasik is the most renowned since Nasik is the focus of the 12-yearly **Maha-Kumbha Mela** which in holy importance is next only to the Kumbha of Prayag. Literally, millions of devotees, *sadhus* of Northern **Akhadas**, priests from the South and the East, families, *bairagis*, *sanyasis* congregate here during the auspicious configurations of stars in the Kumbha period. The temple architecture is influenced by Northern style as craftsmen from Rajasthan, Gujarat and Malwa had helped in construction.

Less frequented but not less sacred are the other three *Jyotirlingas* of Maharashtra each one established in ancient temples of stone manifesting different forms of architecture. **Bheemashankar**, about 120 kms from Pune and located in scenic surroundings lush with verdant greenery and imposing hills is particularly revered by the local tribal communities such as *Warli, Koli* and *Mahadeo Koli* who congregate in large numbers there on the *Tripuri Purnima* day for the *yatra*. The ancient temple has seen several incarnations. It was repeatedly destroyed by Islamic fanatics and repeatedly rebuilt. The latest construction was during the Peshwa period and its architecture is influenced by the Malwa and Rajasthan styles. It beautifully blends with the surrounding natural beauty. Once remote and difficult to access it can now be reached by surfaced road and is developed into a tourist spot.

Another *Jyotirlinga* is **Ghrushneshwar** which is very close by the famous Ellora caves. Here again, the original

temple built during the Rashtrakuta period was destroyed and rebuilt several times. It was last renovated in 1730 and thus distinctly displays several influences on its style, Southern, Gujarati and Rajasthani as also the Persian. The pinnacle and the *chhatris* affirm its Maratha origin. Made of basalt sandstone, the temple presents a challenge to students of architecture in decoding the intermingling influences on the edifice.

**Aundhya Nagnath** in **Parbhani** district is another *Jyotirlinga* in the series. The temple structure is an architectural masterpiece built in the 12th century. The well-proportioned edifice has a wonderfully carved ornamental base, its walls ornate with aesthetically carved deities and *yakshas* and its pillars and pilasters well decorated. As usual, the deity and the temple is associated with many legends and is frequented by local tribes for *yatras*. **Vaidynath** of **Parali** in **Beed** district not very far from Pune is the fifth *Jyotirlinga* in Maharashtra.

Thus, for curious visitors, temple architecture buffs, religious minded devotees and students of religion, architecture, sociology and folk rituals, temples in Maharashtra offer a variety of fare of architectural curiosities, traditional rituals, musical instruments and compositions, scenic marvels and complexities of sociological phenomena to choose from. Only a few selected temples which offer this fare are mentioned here:

**Kalaram** Temple of **Nasik** made of solid black basalt and its architecture influenced by the Northern 'Vesara'..... style; **Ram** temple of **Ramtek** near **Nagpur** built distinctly in the Eastern style with influence of Maratha ambience - it was here that **Kalidasa** is supposed to have composed his famous epic *Meghadoot*; the 11th century **Changdeo** temple located on the confluence of rivers *Tapti* and *Purna* in **Jalgaon** district which is an architectural curiosity as some experts believe the present structure was supposed to be the base

for a super structure never built; **Shiva** temple at **Ambernath** near **Mumbai**, an architectural marvel built in the 10th century when the **Silahara** dynasty was ruling **Konkan**; **Parvati** and **Belbag** temples of **Pune**, **Jnaneshwar** temple at **Alandi** near **Pune**; **Rukhmini** temple of **Nagpur** built by **Raghoji Bhosale** in the 18th century in what is now termed as 'Nagpur style' which displays the dominant influence of **Orissa** craftsmen on its architecture; and the **Mahabaleshwar** temple at the famous hill station of the same name.

### Caves and Cave Temples

Other than the world famous caves of **Ajanta** and **Ellora**, about which much has been written, ancient and medieval artists of Maharashtra wielding hammer and chisel have carved many such wonders displaying their amazing diligence and creativity. The 13 caves of **Pitalkhora** again near **Aurangabad** are carved between the 2nd and the 5th century. Experts observe that the works in these caves are strikingly richer and more elaborate, the carvings more precise than those in the **Ajanta** and **Ellora** caves.

For the record, the 34 cave temples and monasteries of **Ellora**, carved between 5th and 11th century A.D. and about 30 km from **Aurangabad** are known for remarkable sculptures. The most famous one is of course the intricately carved **Kailas Temple** cut from a single massive rock from top to bottom. Significantly, **Jainism**, **Buddhism** and **Hinduism** all find their spiritual echoes in different caves. **Ajanta** caves better known for their marvellous rock paintings are more ancient, carved and painted between 2nd Century B.C. and 6th century A.D. These are about 100 km from **Aurangabad** and are also approachable from **Jalgaon**. The paintings which largely depict the life of **Buddha** and thereby the contemporary social life, are a delight of artistes, poets, sculptors, sociologists, archaeologists and historians alike.

Among other caves the most stunning ones are on the **Elephanta** island just across the Mumbai harbour where reposes the world famous massive *Trimurti* of *Brahma Vishnu and Mahesh*, serene in its majesty and awe-inspiring in its beauty. The grand sculpture was made around the 6th century A.D. under the patronage of the Chalukya kings. Another group of 109 caves lies in the Mumbai metropolitan perimeter in the Borivli National Park—**Kanheri** caves. These are Buddhist caves carved between 2nd and 9th century A.D.

In the vicinity of Mumbai, about 105 km on way to Pune is another chain of Buddhist caves carved out around the 1st century B.C. These are the **Karle** caves as exquisite and elegant in design and beauty as the Ellora and Ajanta. Close to Karle, there are more chains - at **Bhaje, Bedse, Lohagad and Visapur**. These also have rich and extensive Viharas, exquisite carvings and inscriptions narrating stories and episodes.

### Hill Stations

The Sahyadri and Satpura ranges have numberless beautiful spots which offer breath-taking and awe-inspiring view of the nature. Some of these plateaus have been converted into cosy hill stations—some during the British period and quite a few after independence. The state has provided considerable infrastructure to develop and modernise these stations with modern communication and amenities to attract tourists.

The queen of the hill stations in the Deccan is supposed to be **Mahabaleshwar** near Wai in Satara district. Close to it is its twin, **Panchgani** which boasts of an unusually large and flat 'tableland' and has spawned residential schools for the wealthy. The hill station closer to Mumbai, about 90 km. is **Matheran** which is one hill resort where motor cars are strictly not allowed. The other notable hill stations are

**Chikhaldara** near the Melghat Tiger Project in Amravati district, **Amboli** in Kolhapur and **Khandala** and **Lonavala** in Pune district but not very far from Mumbai.

### Beaches

Sahyadri sometimes dips its foot bang into the Arabian sea creating gorgeous sites, beautiful gorges and many sandy-leafy beaches of world class. Regrettably (some would say wisely), the state government has not advertised much these nature's gems and so quite a few beauties are not known to the world outside. The result is many of Maharashtra's wonderful beaches have remained unspoilt offering peace, quietness and joy almost outside this world.

Located within the metropolitan limits of Mumbai are three palm-fringed golden beaches—**Marve, Manori** and **Gorai**. Do not compare these gems to the *bhelpuri*-stall fringed Girgaum, Juhu and Dadar *chowpattys* of Mumbai. To the South of Mumbai, across the creek and onto the mainland close by are the long and beautiful beaches of **Kihim** and **Alibag**.

The most famous beach of Maharashtra, which now the Government is trying to sell on the international market, is **Tarkari** where the river Karii streams into the Arabian Sea in Sindhudurg district about 500 km South of Mumbai. The place is so unspoilt and water so clear here that on a sunny day one can see the seabed through twenty feet of water. The tourism department, of course, is making every effort to make the beach a hot spot for international tourists. The **Sindhudurg** fort in the sea is close by. Further south are **Shiroda** and **Ajgaon** beaches.

From Shiroda to Mumbai, the long sea shore is dotted with numerous virgin beaches. Some of these are **Mochamad, Deobag, Ganpatipule, Ratnagiri, Shriwardhan, Harihareshwar, Velneshwar** and **Mandwa**. And when you are sitting on a beach in Maharashtra, the green cliffs of

Sahyadri are not very far away enhancing the picturesque beauty of your place of solitude.

### Cities and Towns

#### *Mumbai*

Portugal which had taken possession of the seven swampy islands in the 16th century on the West coast of India a few km South of Bassein (now Vasai) perhaps found no use for them and gave them away in dowry to England when its Prince Charles II was married to Portuguese princess Catherine Braganza in 1661. Later, the Queen's government leased out the islands to the British East India Company at the annual rent of 10 pounds. The British found that the natural harbour sheltered by the islands will be of some use and started shifting trade and some offices there. That was the beginning of the city which has grown in today's bustling megapolis of 12 million people—Bombay now known as Mumbai.

The historic importance of Mumbai and its contribution to the country's economy as also to the freedom struggle is dealt with earlier. Here only some places of interest and certain phenomena peculiar to Mumbai are mentioned. For example, Mumbai is the most affluent city of India where the richest and the wealthiest live. But it is also the city of the middle classes, the lower middle classes and the poor. For the poor, it is among the easiest cities to live in considering the availability of self-created jobs for those who are willing to work. Hence the proliferation of slums.

For over two centuries it is fondly called 'mother Mumbai' in Marathi. It is the biggest commercial centre of India and the Mecca of the wealthy Hindi film industry. On the other hand, it is also the main centre of the Marathi cultural, literary and theatre activities. Mumbai, perhaps, is the only place in India where half a dozen halls dedicated

to theatre have drama performances mostly in Marathi every day. And till recently, it manifested the industrial workers' culture at its best. The textile worker of Bombay was known for its heightened socio-cultural and political awareness. With the decline of the textile industry, that robust culture is vanishing.

Mumbai is also known for its fast and efficient urban public transport system, considered the best in India. Its suburban railway transport system is the largest and carries the heaviest load of passengers in the world. The Central Railway and Western Railway together transport every day log nearly 7 million commuters trips. Similarly, the city bus transport, managed by the Bombay Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) undertaking of the municipal corporation is also the largest and the most efficient in the country. The BEST has a fleet of about 5,000 well-maintained buses and there are hundreds of routes criss-crossing the island city which enable commuters to go from any part of the city to any other part. The frequency of the routes is ideal.

The reasonably priced efficient public transport has made Mumbai a haven for the common man. However, the suburban rail system also happens to be the most crowded one in the world. And though the state government with the help of the World Bank is spending substantial money on improving the roads and building state-of-the-art flyovers to ease traffic congestion, only lukewarm efforts seem to have been made to improve the suburban rail system to ease over-crowding. People in far larger numbers use the cheaper suburban rail network than buses or cars for commuting daily to their work place and back home.

A truly secular city, people belonging to most major religions practiced in the world live here. There are Hindu and Jain temples and Muslim mosques galore. But there are also churches, Buddhist viharas, Parsi agiaries, gurudwaras



and synagogues. People speaking a variety of languages, Indian and foreign, have lived here for generations. Greater Mumbai Municipal Corporation runs primary and secondary schools in - apart from Marathi - Urdu, Gujarati, Tamil, Telugu and Kannada.

Mumbai is art lovers' delight too. It has several art galleries fully booked by artists from all over the country all over the year. Among the famous ones are Jehangir Art Gallery, Pundole, Cymroza, Bajaj and Taj art galleries besides several smaller ones in the suburbs. True to its image as the 'mini-India', the city exhibits many schools and styles of architecture. From Eastern and Oriya styles to typical southern and north Indian, one finds all architectural styles of Hindu temples in Mumbai. Even the ancient tribal shrines are preserved.

Generally, in those parts built by the British, Indo-Saracenic and Gothic architecture dominates. For example, the Fort are, Ballard Estate and parts of Colaba. The most notable architectural edifices of this kind are the Victoria Terminus Building (Now renamed Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus), a massive serene structure which inspires awe and exudes imperial power in all its glory, the Mumbai Municipal Corporation, equally grand but elegant like a fair-tale castle, Churchgate, the Town Hall, the General Post Office, the Prince of Wales Museum, University of Mumbai, the High Court, David Sassoon Library and so on. During the last four decades, the city has been dotted with numerous sky-scrappers. The city has one of the finest harbours in the country which is a bustling port today. It has a number of large and small beaches; but the most beautiful sea view is along an elegant driveway in South Bombay called Marine Drive.

### *Nagpur*

Second only to Mumbai in political importance in

Maharashtra, Nagpur is known for several of its features. Geographically, Nagpur is almost at the focal point of sub-continental India and therefore a crossing centre for major North-South and East-West road, rail and air routes in the country. It is known as the 'orange city' because choicest oranges are grown in Vidarbha and Nagpur is its chief market place. It has been the capital of the Central Province (C.P.) and Berar for a long time till the Vidarbha area was merged with bilingual Bombay in 1956. In Maharashtra it is given the status of the second capital and the state legislature holds its winter session there every year. Above all, Nagpur is the seat of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh established by Dr. K.B.Hedgewar who spent his life in this city.

Because it has been the capital of the majority Hindi-speaking C.P. the dominant language of the bazaar is Hindi. The city was established by the Gond king Raja Bakht Buland near a tiny rivulet called Nag River in the early 18th century. Hence its name Nagpur. Soon it was taken over by the Bhosales under the Peshwa. The British dissolved the Bhosale principality in 1853 when it became part of the British empire. For the C.P., later named Madhya Prant, it was a centre of learning and trade. The Nagpur University was established in 1923 and the city boasts of several educational institutions, state and Central government offices.

Easily accessible from Nagpur by road are several interesting sites. One is Nawgaon Bandh which has a complex of beautiful lakes flanked by green hills and inhabited by wild life and a variety of birds. It is one of the most popular forest resorts of Maharashtra which has a deer park and also a bird sanctuary named after the famous ornithologist, Dr. Salim Ali. Nagzira, another wild life sanctuary, the Markandeya temples which boast of beautiful sculptures as finely chiselled and exotic as those of Khajurao,

Tadoba National Park and Wildlife sanctuary, a haven of tigers, in Chandrapur district is also not very far. And for the truly adventurous, the fantastic Tiger reserve of Melghat around Kolhas is also approachable by road from Nagpur.

### *Pune*

The cultural capital of Maharashtra, it had remained the centre of Maratha power for nearly a century and half. Although the place has ancient lineage, it came to prominence when Shahaji Bhosale bequeathed it in Jahagir to his young son, Shivaji in early 16th century. Jijabai, his mother, made Shivaji to clear with a golden hoe the town of Puner which was devastated by marauders. Since then it has been the centre of political activities in Maharashtra. It gained in importance when Bajirao, the first Brahmin prime minister appointed by Shivaji's heir, made Pune its capital in 1726. After the British annexed the Peshwa kingdom in 1818, the Governor of the Deccan made Pune his seat for a long time.

Situated at the confluence of rivers Mula and Mutha, Pune's salubrious climate has made the city a centre of vigorous educational, political and cultural activities from the early English rule. After the formation of Maharashtra state, industries began appearing in the city and around with great speed and today Pune happens to be a major industrial and commercial city next only to Mumbai. It is also the main educational centre of Maharashtra. Being a historic place, there are many monuments within and without. The city has acquired an intellectual aura chiefly because of a long chain of great men associated with it—Shivaji, the Peshwas, Justice Ranade, Phule, Bhandarkar, Tilak, Agarkar, Gokhale etc. It is the seat of the Deccan College, one of the most respected institute on Indology, Deccan Education Society's Fergusson college founded by Tilak and Agarkar.

As mentioned earlier, there may not be many grand architectural sites in and around Pune. But there are cultural institutions, drama associations, programmes of classical music galore, burgeoning experimental theatre, typical self-made research institution like Bharat Itihas Samshodhak Mandal and for a gourmet, abundant hotels, restaurants, small eateries and classic Maharashtrian inns. Pune is the eaters' paradise and if you are curious about authentic Maharashtra cuisine, Pune is the place to look for it.

Not that Pune is bereft of grand monuments. There is Shaniwarwada of the Peshwa. Its stark plain stone walls alone remain without any noticeable ornamentation, a reminder of the Maratha frugality. There are typical wadas from the Peshwa period with carved wooden doors, arches and coloured murals. The Lofty Simhagad fort forms an impressive backdrop for Pune reminding the Puneites of the fighting and rebellious spirit of Shivaji. There is a peculiar museum, modest and yet grand in content, life-time collection of one man. The Raja Kelkar Museum is named after him. It displays artefacts, pieces of art, furniture, jewellery, textiles, utensils and equipment of everyday household use which represent the quintessential art of Maharashtra.

### *Aurangabad*

Aurangabad already is a bustling centre for International tourists interested in exotic arts and archaeological curiosities. Well-connected to the world by rail, road and air, Aurangabad is at hopping distance from many interesting places such as Ajanta and Ellora. The beautiful caves with finer carvings of Pitalkhora are also close by. The ancient fort of Deogiri renamed Daulatabad associated with stories of romance and treachery is just beyond city limits. The ancient trade centre and the capital of the Satvahana

dynasty, Pratishthan, now called Paithan is hardly a hours drive from Aurangabad. The Jayakwadi dam at Paithan on Godavari River provides a feast for bird- watchers.

An old village of Khadki was taken over in 1604 from the Mughals by Nizam's minister Malik Ambar who turned it into a town. Later, Aurangzeb captured the town and named it after himself, Aurangabad. Once a very small town of little significance, Aurangabad prospered after Marathwada region merged with linguistic Maharashtra. It is now the headquarters of the Marathwada division and a busy cultural, educational and commercial centre. Dr. Ambedkar worked hard to set up the first college here. The city now boasts of a University which is named as Dr. Ambedkar Marathwada University.

A large number of decent hotels including five star ones cater to the tourist traffic. There are many interesting sites within the city too. A modest and yet spectacular replica of Agra's Taj Mahal stands right in the midst of the city. It is called 'Bibi ka Makbara' and was built to commemorate Aurangzeb's wife Begum Rabia Durrani in 1679 by the Emperor's son. A Pan Chakki or Water Mill built by Malik Ambar demonstrates the technology used in bringing water to the city. There are some old caves with tantra carvings and several mosques in the vicinity.

### **Nasik**

Now a bustling industrial and commercial town, Nasik is an ancient city which finds mention in the Ramayana and also in the famous mathematician and philosopher Ptolemy's works. It was on the ancient trade route which linked the ancient port of Sopara north of Mumbai to Pratishthan in the heart of Marathwada. Legend has it that Lord Rama during his 14-year exile stayed here for a while. Emperor Akbar too had camped here and has written about the beauty of the town.

The city is a holy place famous for the Kumbh, the Kalaram Temple and the Ramkund on River Godavari where devote Hindus wish to immerse their ashes after death. Close by are three famous places of pilgrimage: Tryambakeshwar, the seat of the most venerated Jyotirlinga; Goddess Saptashringi of Wani; and the most famous of Shirdi of Sai Baba. Not very far from Nasik are the Pandavleni caves excavated nearly 2,000 years ago by Jain kings and saints. Among the carved figures are Buddha, Bodhisatva and several Jain Tirthankars.

Nasik, an ancient place of learning where Sanskrit *pathshalas* teaching the four Vedas flourished till recently, is also known for excellent educational institutions now. The state's open university, the Yashwantrao Chavan Mukta Vidyapeeth is located in the vicinity.

## SUMMING UP

The Indian juggernaut moves ahead with its own momentum and its own pace. If Maharashtra is a progressive and one of the most industrialised states, it only means that it is among the frontline states that are struggling to lend their might to accelerate the pace of the country's development.

Maharashtra from the ancient times is at the crossroads of the North and the South and thereby represents the quintessential India in its glorious diversity of cultures and sub-cultures and enchanting variety of physical geography, races and languages. And yet, like India, despite its mind-boggling heterogeneity, it manifests amazing homogeneity, unity in diversity, a mosaic as Nehru describes India; or a colourful quilt made of beautiful shreds which exudes warmth and affection. The intermingling of faiths, races, languages, sartorial and culinary cultures, folk arts and even styles of temple architecture—a phenomenon that is the hallmark of the Indian ethos, is seen as intensely in Maharashtra as elsewhere in India.

Despite this fusion, Maharashtra has evolved its distinct identity through the teachings and literature of the medieval saint poets, the *Warkari Sampradaya* of the hoary past, the spark of freedom lighted in the hearts of its people by Shivaji and the social reform movement of the last century which mellowed the orthodox angularities of its people. Any visitor who moves through Maharashtra's cities and interior rural

areas would find the people here pleasantly tolerant, accommodative and least inclined to impose their language or culture on the outsiders. It does not mean they are not a proud people. Occasionally, they do rise in just resentment whenever their identity is hurt or threatened beyond tolerance. And yet, they will be among the first to proclaim passionately they are the Indians first.

Endowed by rugged mountains and several river valleys, Maharashtra has to endure chronic droughts in a rain-shadow belt created by the Sahyadri ranges. The agriculture mostly is dependent on the mercy of the monsoon. The irrigation potential is far lower than the average in India and the state is struggling hard to achieve the maximum potential. But in spite of this nature's curse, the enterprising farmer of Maharashtra through his hard work and innovative temper has made great strides in horticulture and in agro-based processing industries. The cooperative sugar movement in the state has transformed the economic scene in rural Maharashtra over the last four decades. The state is almost self-sufficient in production of food grains.

The Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS), an innovation that arose out of the need to provide succour to millions of famine-hit people in the early seventies, has stabilised the agricultural wages. As a consequence, it has to a great extent reduced the flow of desperate starving people from rural areas of Maharashtra to the cities and towns. Additionally the scheme, which has a statutory backing, has bestowed on every able-bodied man and woman in rural and semi-urban areas the right to work. The state is obliged to provide work on demand. The slogan of the scheme is *maagel tyaalaa kaam*. The state has also managed to undertake and complete several agricultural and rural development works under the EGS. The scheme has been applauded by the World Bank and is accepted by

the Government of India in principle for implementation elsewhere.

The ambience created by the social reform movement has reduced - if not annihilated—the caste and gender discrimination. The caste rivalries, however, do manifest on occasions but not necessarily in respect of traditional customs, religious issues, rituals or nefarious practices such as untouchability and pollution. Minor confrontations occur in the race for gaining socio-economic, cultural and political power. This, some sociologists observe, is a positive sign of development. And of course, as everywhere else in India, the caste factor continues to dominate in electoral politics and in sharing of political power.

It must be noted, however, that post-independence Maharashtra enjoyed a long period of political stability when the demographically dominant Maratha caste held the reins of power. When that caste splintered politically, the stability was lost. Of course, there are many other factors including the changed equations on the national political scene that are also responsible for the political uncertainty in Maharashtra politics that prevails today. The national political matrix has been undergoing dramatic changes and Maharashtra cannot remain unaffected with these stormy changes.

If the scheduled castes in India are articulating their increasing aspirations for empowerment, the credit must go to Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, the great son of Maharashtra who infused the sense of self-respect and thirst for education among them. Ambedkar's movement brought about a seminal change in the socio-cultural and political ambience of Maharashtra. Today competent 'dalit' intellectuals have carved a niche for themselves in the mainstream culture of the state. They occupy prominent positions in art and literature, cultural institutions, political parties and the bureaucracy. 'Dalit literature' which manifests the resurgent

mood of the oppressed classes in India and gives a new dimension to the Indian literature as a whole, first originated in Maharashtra in a revolutionary upsurge. That it has enriched the Marathi language and has greatly enhanced its sweep is acknowledged by academicians and scholars.

The industrial development is largely concentrated in the Mumbai-Pune-Nasik triangle and around the cities of Nagpur and Aurangabad. But that picture is slowly changing and the state needs to do much in this respect. That explains why despite it being a frontline state Maharashtra falls a little short in respect of some development parameters as compared to some other states in the country. Maharashtra ranks among the highest in respect of GDP and per capita income. But that is so largely because of the magnetic pull of Mumbai-Pune-Nasik belt. Here too the state shall have to exert much more to remove this shortcoming.

The state, now highly urbanised, is taking to information technology with great zeal. One finds proliferation of cyber cafes not only in big cities but also in mofussil towns and even smaller centres. Farmers and agricultural cooperative societies check the rates of their produce in the international markets on the internet. Maharashtra may lack in entrepreneurial acumen. But its people have provided skilled workers to industries for a long time. No wonder industrial workers' unions first sprang in Mumbai. Indeed, the Communist movement and for that matter the Indian National Congress too originated here.

People of Maharashtra are passionate lovers of theatre and music. Nowhere else in India the amateur and commercial theatre activity is so prolific, wide spread and so well patronised by the people. The folk musical forms are rich and integrated with the peasants' life. And there are numerous institutions and peoples' clubs which form a very large and appreciative audience for the Hindustani classical music. Indeed, the movement for revitalising,

reforming and popularising the traditional Hindustani classical music originated in Maharashtra.

Literary events, in cities or in smaller places, attract large crowds. There are several cultural movements and institutions which nourish literature, theatre and music. *Grantha Yatra*, mobile book-exhibition-cum-festivals to promote books and reading habits, is perhaps a unique feature of Maharashtra's cultural scene. Large networks of libraries supported by the state government, local municipal bodies or panchayat institutions still thrive. Besides this, several cities and towns boast of circulating libraries run on commercial lines.

There are a number of publishing houses, large and small and Maharashtra as a whole produces around 1000 Marathi books, fiction and nonfiction other than text books and guides every year. Most of the districts in the state boast of a number of daily newspapers, some running into thirty or more. More than 300 Marathi dailies published in the state, some full-fledged state level newspapers with several supplements and pullouts, others irregular rags. The total number of newspapers including dailies and other periodicals in Marathi, English, Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati and many other Indian languages published in Maharashtra was around 4000. Mumbai being the focus of the national market and financial activities, continues to be a thriving media centre.

And if Maharashtra is the birth place of the modern cinema, Mumbai is the centre of India's burgeoning entertainment industry. It is now fondly nicknamed by the media as 'Bollywood'. Nasik is where Dadasaheb Phalke made his first Indian film. And Pune is the place where the Film and Television Institute of India as also the National Film Archives, one of the finest state-of-the-art repositories of old and new films of India, is based.

People of Maharashtra are proud of their history, particularly of the Shivaji era. There are many monuments in the form of formidable mountain forts, strong, rugged and inaccessible which reveal the spirit of defiance of oppressive authority. Maharashtra lacks in magnificent architectural edifices of historic times. But that shortcoming is amply made up by the typical mountain forts, the ancient and medieval temples which testify to the land being a meeting ground of the North and the South and the world famous cave temples of Ajanta, Elephanta and Ellora. There are beautiful hill stations, wild life sanctuaries and pristine beaches.

And to borrow from Jawaharlal Nehru's famous phrase, there are in Maharashtra numerous 'modern centres of pilgrimage'—river dams, giant industrial factories, oil refineries, science research laboratories, science institutions of world fame, planetariums, science exhibitions and networks of reputed social institutions doing selfless work for the poor, the downtrodden and the oppressed.

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